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A  
WAIF  
~OF~  
THE SEA.

By  
KATE WOOD





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# A WAIF OF THE SEA.











*Frontispiece.*     **MR. BARKER RECEIVING HIS LITTLE GUESTS.**

A  
WAIF OF THE SEA.

BY  
KATE WOOD,  
AUTHOR OF "LORY BELL," &C.

*ILLUSTRATED.*



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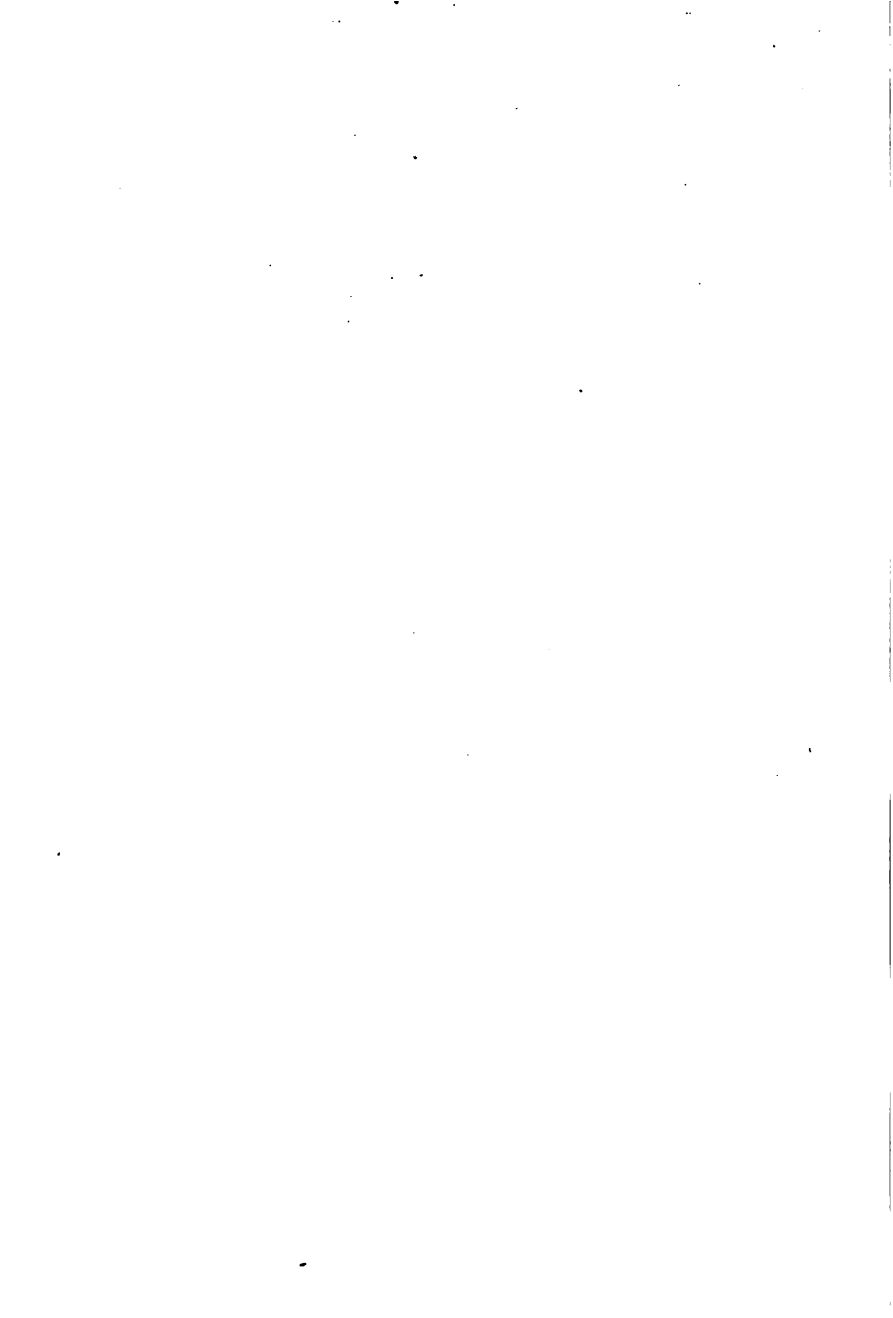
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# A WAIF OF THE SEA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HOW NELLIE MADE A FRIEND.



HE evening was closing in, and the London streets were full of mud and slush.

Several heavy showers of sleet and rain had fallen during the day, and with a dark leaden sky overhead came a sharp biting March wind, that, "gentle as a lamb in the morning, was now raging fierce as a roaring lion."

It was all very well for those who were warm and comfortably sheltered in-doors, but cold and cheerless enough for the people in the streets, who, hurrying along with bent heads, watery eyes, and blue pinched noses, had to encounter its keen blasts.

Protecting wraps were flung open, hats whirled



aloft went sailing in the air, and as to umbrellas, it would have been impossible to have told how many of them, blown inside out, had left their owners lamenting.

But it was at a corner of one of the streets in the Strand leading to the river that the wind seemed determined to indulge in the most spiteful antics; and there it charged full tilt at an old white-haired pleasant-faced gentleman, who, with frantic efforts to keep his feet, made a dash forward, lost his balance, and in endeavouring to regain it, fell against the shivering form of a poor half-starved looking woman, who, with two wretchedly clad children by her side, were standing on the kerb-stone trying to sell a few bunches of spring flowers.

The shock was as great as it was unexpected, and the woman, staggering for the moment under it, caught, in her efforts to save herself, the child nearest to her, and dragged her to the ground, upsetting as she did so her basket of flowers, and scattering its contents on the muddy pavement.

"Oh! my poor flowers; my violets and prim-roses!" cried the little girl in a sweet childish voice, as she scrambled to her feet and ruefully regarded them. "Oh! Mrs. Field, what shall I do? they're all destroyed, and I've not taken a penny to-day."

"There, don't bawl out like that and make such

a noise over the withered old things," remarked her young companion; "they ain't worth such a fuss; who'd be fool enough to buy 'em?" and she laughed aloud.

"Hold your aggravating tongue, Polly Matthews," exclaimed the woman angrily. "You're always teasing Nellie, and if you don't stop I'll just tell your mother. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, going on so."

"There, my dear?" and she laid her hand kindly on the child's shoulder, while Polly Matthews, frightened by the threat of telling her mother, looked sullenly on; "don't fret, the flowers only want washing; here in the gutter will do, and they'll be all right, and nobody the wiser. Don't cry, my child; the gentleman didn't tumble against me on purpose."

And to judge by the surprise and dismay depicted on the gentleman's face it was evident such a proceeding would have been the last thing he would have attempted.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, as grasping his umbrella tightly with one hand to steady himself, with the other he seized his hat just in time to prevent it taking an aerial flight. "Bless me! but it's all this March wind; blowing a gale enough to take one off their legs. But I hope, my good woman, you're not hurt?"

"No, sir," answered Mrs. Field; "I'm all right,

though it was a good shake you gave me, sir;" and she smiled a faint patient smile; "but there's nothing the matter with me." Then, with the unselfishness so often to be observed among the poor, she pointed to the child by her side and added,—

"It's little Nellie, sir, that's most hurt; she has muddled her flowers."

"Dear me! yes, yes!" was the reply; then after much rummaging, first in one pocket then in another, he produced a purse, took from it a shilling, which he gave to the woman, and then turning to Nellie continued: "No bones broken? eh, child? but what can one expect in a wind like this? There, there, take that; it will pay for some of your spoilt violets," and dropping a coin into her hand he hurried off as fast as he could.

"Well! what have you got?" eagerly asked Polly as she greedily eyed Nellie's closed hand. "What did the old gent give you?"

"It was kind of him," interrupted the woman, "to give me a whole shilling. God knows it's little enough I've earned, standing here this bitter weather, night and day as I've done, with my husband out of work and two little children crying for bread. But what is it, Nellie?" as a burst of delight escaped the girl's lips, and she held up with a happy laugh—a bright new half-crown.

"Half-a-crown! well, I declare!" cried Polly

Matthews as she tried to snatch it from her. "I'll cry 'Halves.' Hand it over, it's as much mine as yours, 'cos we stood together, and I might just as well have gone down as you."

But Mrs. Field interfered and pushed the girl away. "It's not yours," she exclaimed, "and you sha'n't touch it. Hold it tight, Nell; don't let her come anigh you. She's a bad 'un, and will steal it from you if she can."

But Nellie clutched it tightly, and said turning to Polly:

"You shall not have it, nor anyone else. I see what it is, the gentleman has made a mistake. He thought it was a penny he had given me for the bunch of violets, and being flustered like didn't know what it really was."

"But you're never agoin' to be such a fool as to tell him anything about it," answered Polly. "Surely you're not such a duffer as that."

"I'm not a thief," was the reply, "and it's my duty to give him back his own;" and before Mrs. Field could say one word of approval at the girl's honesty she was hurrying away as fast as a pair of old shoes (many sizes too large for her poor little benumbed feet) allowed her, in the direction the gentleman had taken.

It did not take her long to come up with him, and she timidly laid her hand on his arm to attract his attention.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed as he looked down with astonishment at the breathless little figure. "What is the matter now?"

"Please, sir, it is only this;" and Nellie held up the half-crown to him.

"There, there, girl," he answered sharply; "I knew how it would be. You may give to the poor,"—here he raised his eyes and shook his head as if appealing to the chimney-pots; "you may work for them, do all you can to help them, and expect no gratitude. They're never thankful. Of course, child, you are not satisfied; you want more."

"More, sir!" repeated Nellie; "more, sir! I've come to give this back to you—I think you thought it was only a penny."

He looked at her intently. Honesty among the poor, that was something different to what he expected; it was a new version to his story, and therefore something hard to believe.

"Has your mother put you up to this?" he asked after a slight pause.

"No, sir; I've got none," she answered softly.

"Got none, eh? then who is the woman with you, encouraging you and that other child to block up the pavement, to impede traffic, to be a nuisance to the passers-by, and to be an obstruction, yes, an obstruction, in the public highway?"

Poor little Nellie, she had been called many rude names before by Polly Matthews, but to be "an obstruction," ah! that was too terrible.

"Well!" continued the old gentleman, with his sharp gray eyes fixed on her, "did the police never tell you that you were an annoyance, a hindrance to every profession, trade, or calling, and that as such you must move on?"

"Oh, yes, sir," and the child's voice faltered. "They've told us to move on ever so many times, but we may stand where we do to-day if our baskets don't take up room on the pavement, and we don't annoy the people going by."

"People going by!" repeated the old gentleman, as if glad of a new grievance. "Who with a grain of common sense wants to be out in such weather? I'm sure I don't, nor you, eh?"

"No, sir; but I have to be."

"Oh! indeed. Well, then, your mother ought to be ashamed of herself," and he gave an emphatic thump with his umbrella, "to send a poor little creature like you out in it."

"But please, sir," interrupted Nellie, with tears in her eyes and a sob in her voice, "I've got no mother, she died at Christmas."

"Poor child! poor child!" and he glanced down kindly at her. "Well, then, your father."

"I've got no father either, sir;" and she tried to speak steadily. "He was a fisherman, and

was drowned. There is no one to take care of me and my little sister but old Meg."

"Oh! then you have a sister?"

"Yes, sir. Little Birdie."

"Little who?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Birdie, sir."

The old gentleman softly whistled.

"Hawk, Crow, Owl, Pigeon, Duck, *Goose!*" and emphasizing each word, he pronounced the last one loudly.

"No, sir," replied Nellie, who could not see the implied joke. "She was not so big as a goose. Mother said she was more like a little bright-eyed loving Robin. A little thing one couldn't hurt or harm."

In spite of the sly twinkle in his eyes and the amused expression of his face, and it may be added the wind blowing keen and cold around them, Nellie had evidently interested her eccentric interlocutor, for he suddenly asked her name and where she lived.

"My name, sir, is Nellie Gray; and I live with Birdie and Old Meg over there"—and she pointed towards the city—"at number nine Golden Square. We live in the same house with Mr. Barker, and," she continued eagerly, "anyone will tell you where he lives, for he mends boots and shoes."

But the only reply to this vague explanation of which part of London was her home was an

emphatic—"Humph! and who supports you? I suppose that woman I saw with you."

"No, sir. Mrs. Field lives in the next street, but she is very kind to me and Birdie."

"What! your sister? What do you call her?"

"Birdie, sir; but her real name is Dorothea; only mother loved to call her Birdie. You should hear her sing, sir," and Nellie's eyes sparkled; "mother was so proud of her voice; she said she sang like an angel."

"Well, well, child," was the impatient reply; "but who works for you and your sister and supports you both? Eh!"

"Old Meg, sir, was mother's friend, and she promised her when she was dying she would look after us, but she can't do much now, she's too old and rheumatic; but she gets a bit of work now and then—charring or washing—and I sell cresses, and oranges, and flowers, and radishes—anything that comes handy I try to do so as to help her keep us. I held a gentleman's horse the other day," she continued with a bright smile, "and he gave me sixpence; and I run errands or mind a baby; but when I'm bigger I shall earn ever so much more, because I shall be stronger."

"When you're bigger!" and the old man looked compassionately on the slender childish figure before him, while at the same time it must have been the wind that, now driving furiously clouds



of dust before it, brought those glistening drops so suspiciously resembling tears into his eyes, or sending some of its irritating grains down his throat, made him turn his head aside and cough violently.

"When you're bigger, poor child," he muttered, as diving once more into his pockets he fumbled in each for his purse. "Such a mite, such a mite, as she is."

And a mite certainly she seemed to be to have such a load of anxiety, care, and daily toil placed upon her young shoulders.

Old Meg might do all she could to keep her promise, but it was evident Nellie was the chief bread-winner; and it was she who had to bear the burden and heat of the day. And yet by her height and appearance she could not have been more than nine or ten years of age, but had a sad thoughtful look beyond her years on her pale pitiful face.

Had she been rosy and plump like other children she would have been considered a very pretty child, for her features were regular and delicate; her eyes large, dark, and expressive; her mouth small, sweet, and tender; while a battered old hat but half concealed a profusion of rich brown wavy hair that would have been a loving mother's delight or nurse's pride to have kept in order.

Her dress, thin and ill-fitting, was as clean and

tidy as patches and darns could make it, while over her poor little shoulders was a faded old-fashioned shawl crossed in the front and tied in a huge knot behind. Yet in spite of her poverty-stricken attire a certain grace and refinement marked the child, and made one think, if her father had been only a fisherman, her mother must have been of gentler birth.

But Nellie's strange questioner had found his purse and given her a sixpence from it.

"There, child!" he exclaimed, "keep the half-crown, I intended you should have it, and take this for—what's her name?"

"Old Meg, sir?"

"No, no; that other ridiculous name."

"Birdie, sir; Little Birdie?"

"Yes, yes, child, that is it; and if I pass this way to-morrow keep a bunch of flowers for me, the muddy ones will do quite as well as the fresh; and now run home as fast as you can, it is too late for a young creature like you to be out. There, good-night. Poor little mite, good-night. God bless you."

She raised her face, wet with tears, and yet smiling with happiness, and looked into his.

"Oh! thank you, sir, ever so much. Mother used to say, 'Trust in God and He will not forsake you;' and I just think He has sent you here to-day."

But he did not wait to hear the remainder of the sentence. Wrestling with his umbrella that seemed determined to be whirled aloft by the boisterous wind, and hurrying away from the shower of sleet now falling, he soon passed from Nellie's sight, and disappeared in the increasing darkness.

Polly Matthews had gone when Nellie returned to Mrs. Field, who was thankful enough, poor woman, to tell her she had sold nearly all her flowers to a lady who had some children with her, and she intended remaining out only a little longer in the hopes of selling what were left. But she urged Nellie to hurry home before the sleet and rain fell faster, and to buy something nice for Meg and Birdie's supper. So nothing loth, the child picked up her basket, and bidding her friend good-night, set off as fast as her frozen feet and ill-fitting shoes would allow her.

A supper! something nice! how delightful it was to think of it, and how kind of the gentleman to give her so much money! What could she get to surprise them at home?

Poor child, she had tasted nothing herself but a slice of dry bread and some weak cold tea at daybreak when she had to be up and at the market to buy her flowers, and a piece of bread was her dinner, so that the thoughts of possessing three shillings, the largest sum she ever had

possessed at one time, and to be able to choose something as delicious as it would be unexpected to her dear ones, made her careless of the increasing wildness of the night.

"Oh!" she thought, as she turned off from the Strand with its glittering shops and dazzling lights, "if mother was only here to have this money, and if I could but tell her of the good friend God has sent me, how glad she would be! but perhaps," and she raised her eyes to the dark angry sky above her, "she knows all about it."

Ah! little Nellie, simple was your faith and strong and trusting your belief in God's goodness.





## CHAPTER II.

### INTRODUCES SOME FRIENDS OF NELLIE'S AND LITTLE BIRDIE.



PARADISE ROW, a narrow dirty street branching off from a busy thoroughfare, led into Golden Square.

The grand names they bore were in direct contradiction to their locality, which was as unpleasant and unhealthy a one as could be found in the heart of the great city.

On a summer's day they were places to be avoided, and now with the accumulation of the winter's refuse thrown out from the houses on either side, they were decidedly more unwholesome and disagreeable to pass through.

The gas lamps were lighted, and their uncertain glimmer was only reflected in the pools of water, foul and stagnant, lodging on the muddy uneven pavement, and on heaps of filth and rubbish or decaying vegetables flung out in the streets by those to whom a dust-bin would have been an unknown luxury.

In such a spot, where with but few exceptions cleanliness and comfort were not to be found, what could be expected of the inhabitants?

Ragged, idle, slatternly women; men besotted with drink, fiercer and more brutal than wild beasts.

Homeless children, tattered, ignorant, and forlorn; unloved, uncared-for, who had never heard of a Saviour's love, or the name of their Maker except in profane oaths or blasphemies. Who would not feel for them? Who would not pity them?

But, as before mentioned, there were exceptions to the wretchedness and squalor around, and one of them was a small chandler's shop at the corner of Paradise Row, into the window of which Nellie Gray was looking eagerly.

The owner, Mrs. O'Brien, a clean respectable Irish woman, was a widow. Her husband, a bricklayer, had been killed by a fall from a ladder. A good deal of sympathy had been expressed in the neighbourhood for the poor woman and her little son, and when, with her small savings, she had started a business, which had been long needed in the neighbourhood, numbers of customers rapidly flocked to her.

From the first time of seeing Nellie, her mother, and sister, she had been interested in them, and shown them many little kindnesses.

She was a bright-eyed active little woman, ever busy, never idle, and now, as she was putting some eggs into a basket and labelling them "new-laid," she catches a glimpse of the wistful face and dark eyes peering in at her.

To rush out, bring the shivering child in-doors, dart into the sitting-room, and return with a cup of hot steaming tea, did not take more than a minute or two.

"Shure an' it's you, Nellie!" she cried, her kind face beaming with smiles. "Where on airth, child, have you been? 'Deed and it's meself that's just been wondherin' what's become of yer."

But Nellie could not for the moment reply; her only motive for keeping away from her kind friend was the fact, that her earnings and Meg's had been so small she had really not had the money to expend on even the necessities of life.

Mrs. O'Brien, with ready tact, soon guessed the reason, and seeing the child's eyes filled with tears turned the conversation.

"There now, darlin', dhrink the tay, it's boilin' hot and you're cowld, and may be drenched to the skin. Shure it's been a dreadful day, an' maybe will be a worse night. There, don't sup widout a bite, tak' this slice of bread and eat it wid the tay."

"But I can pay for it," cried Nellie excitedly. "See what a gentleman gave me!" and she showed her treasure, "and I want to hurry home and take something nice for Meg and Birdie's supper, and for their dinner to-morrow. Now, what can I get?"

"Arrah! dhrink the tay first, and thin give a look around and see what ye would fancy."

And as Nellie eagerly obeyed,—and what a delicious cup of tea it was, and what a pleasant warmth and glow it sent through her! (she little guessed it was the one Mrs. O'Brien had poured out for herself and was the last in the tea-pot),—the kind-hearted widow named the articles she might prefer.

"Now, what will ye choose, alanna? Have some rashers of bacon, three for fourpence, swate and mellow as the pig himself would never have known his own? And faith a ra'al jintleman, I'm thinkin', he must be, and no mistake, to help the fatherless and orphan in so ginerous a way, for a half-crown is two and sixpence, Nellie, and nothin' less. May blessings rest on him."

"Tay, yes, darlin', and half a poun' of sugar, and a half-quartern loaf. Now, what else? Butther? Shure the very best churned, just fresh from the cow. Have the half poun' for sixpence, and why not tak' some eggs? Maybe they'll come in handy for dinner to-morrow, they're the



best London new-laid in the market, and I'll jist do this for yer, Nellie, I'll put in a herrin' for your supper to-morrow. Ye're shure to like it; a good bloater, to my fancy, is the best fish as swims."

"Now, don't hurry away, dear," as Nellie seemed impatient to be off. "I won't be a minnit doin' up the parcel, and don't bother about the money. I know ye're a hard-workin' honest girl, and I'm not goin' to ax ye for it, or put upon yer; tak' yer time, dear, in payin'."

But Nellie, with a happy smile, laid down the money, gathered up her purchases, and, with many thanks and parting nods, was going out of the door, when a child's weak voice was heard from the sitting-room calling her by name.

It was Little Mickey, Mrs. O'Brien's only child, and a cripple.

"Shure it's Mickey, Nellie; go in and spake to the poor babby. Isn't he callin' afther ye," and the next moment she found herself in the cosy parlour, a pale little face lifted to hers, a pair of thin arms encircling her neck.

"Why haven't you come afore?" he asked impatiently. "You know'd I was waiting to see you?"

"But I couldn't, Mickey," she answered, "I have to be so early at the market, and I get home so late generally in the evening, that by the time

Meg and Birdie have had something to eat it's bed-time."

"And you'd ha' gone to-night without coming anigh me," he continued in a querulous tone. "Only I called yer," and his tearful eyes were raised to hers.

But Nellie with a kiss tried to make her peace with him, her conscience meanwhile smiting her, and telling her that what the boy had said was true, and that, in the delight of possessing the money she had so unexpectedly received and her anxiety to return home, her little crippled friend had been forgotten.

"There, don't ye trouble about him," interrupted Mrs. O'Brien, as she gently arranged his pillow and laid her hand on the child's hot forehead. "Shure an' it's one of his bad days, and he gets a thrifle cross lyin' here; but he'll be betther, plase God, in the mornin'. Won't ye, Mickey?" and she bent lovingly over the pale pinched face and wasted little form of her greatest earthly treasure.

But he pushed her aside and beckoned to Nellie.

"I am so sorry," she began. "I didn't intend to vex you, Mickey."

"There, don't say any more about it," he answered, holding up a thin white hand to stop her. "It isn't the truth, and you knows it."

Poor Nellie! to be called "an obstruction" was bad enough, but to have her word doubted was harder to bear.

With flushed cheeks and quivering lips she silently looked at him, until Mrs. O'Brien, seeing her distress, hastened to the rescue.

"An' shure you're not goin' to mind the likes of what he says; he didn't mane it, Nellie, and had no rayson for scoldin' ye; but it's just bein' here all the day, not able, the poor darlin', to get about like the other childer, that makes him quare in timper. 'Deed he's been talkin' of yer the last hour, an' it would be the breakin' of his heart to think ye're offended. Didn't he tell me just now he liked yer betther than any one else but me."

"Oh! Mickey," cried the girl. "How good of you to care for me; because, dear, I can so seldom come and see you, or help you as I would wish. Oh! I am so glad you like me."

"Throth, that's jist what he said, Nellie, darlin'."

To tell the truth, in her heart Nellie had often felt afraid of fretful, peevish little Mickey, and being of the sweetest, gentlest, but most sensitive nature, many a tear had she shed in secret at her evident inability to please him or win his affection.

Many a time had she left old Meg and little

Birdie to run round to Mrs. O'Brien and give her few spare moments to helping her, either in the shop or soothing and amusing Mickey, who, perhaps, had been unusually cross and disagreeable, but never with the certainty that her efforts were appreciated, her coming welcome; and now that she thought the poor little fellow glad to see her her grateful heart was too full to speak.

But what could she find to give him? Just some little thing to show she was sorry to have forgotten him.

She could not buy a book or a toy, for that would be taking money from those at home, and she knew how much they needed every penny.

Suddenly she remembered the flowers, and in another moment had run into the shop and caught up from the basket the largest cleanest bunch of primroses and violets, and placed them in his hand.

"Oh! Nellie," he exclaimed, and his eyes glistened as he buried his face in the flowers.

"Do you really mean these for me?"

"Yes, Mickey dear, if you will have them."

He eyed them intently, pleased and contented, then hastily gave them back to her, and said with a shrewd look and knowing nod,—

"No, no! Nellie, I mustn't keep them. Do you know you could sell them for tuppence, and, as mother says, 'tuppence is tuppence now-a-days.'"

"Deed, thin, ye're right," broke in Mrs. O'Brien; "and it's the cute and clever boy ye are to think of the same. There, tak' back yer nosegay, Nellie, dear, shure an' its little enough ye can spare; but we thank ye kindly for the same good wish and ginerous feelin's of your heart."

"Oh! but Mickey must have them, Mrs. O'Brien," pleaded Nellie eagerly. "And I only wish he could see the beautiful woods and green places where they grow."

"Faith, Nellie, that's jist it," the poor mother answered sadly. "An', shure, to get him into the counthry air, an' let him see the green fields and pick daisies and butther-cups wid other childer, would soon make him well and sthrong; but let me work airly and late I can't get the money to send him. The doctor—an' a kinder-hearted man never lived, for he won't take from a widder—tells me it's only wakeness, and whin he grows bigger he'll grow sthronger, maybe."

"When I grow a big man," said Mickey, looking up at Nellie—"for I ain't always going to be a little chap like now—I shall go in the fields and see what they're like, and I'll take you," and he laughed faintly.

"Why, Mickey, have you never been in the country?" asked Nellie in surprise.

"Sorra a bit," replied his mother. "Wasn't he born in London, and," she added bitterly, "may

die in London. Oh! darlin'," and she bent lovingly over him, "if I could but get ye to my own counthry—to Owld Ireland—it's well and hearty ye'd be, wid the broad say in front an' the blue sky above, an' the fresh mountain breezes blowin' around; but shure it's hard to get work and make the shop pay, and to thry and keep up a dacent appearance, an' I've more pride than to be beggin' and askin' help from sthrangers. But there, Nellie, it's not complainin' that'll mend the matther or betther the same, and I know ye're longin' to be home wid your little sister; but come whin ye like, for it's Mickey, the poor craythur, as likes ye wid him. There, bid him good-night and get off wid ye, or he'd keep yer until cock-crow in the mornin'."

"And take your flowers, Nellie," and the boy held them towards her.

But she refused to do so, and with a parting kiss was turning away when he called her back, and with a serious look said gravely—

"I can't do much for you lyin' here, but p'raps, Nellie, some day I may be of use to you, and if I can," with an emphatic nod, "you see if I don't do it."

And, little as Nellie then thought of it, a day was coming when she gratefully recalled Mickey's words, and knew how faithfully he had kept his promise.

And now, once more out in the wind and rain, she turned the corner of Paradise Row, and hurried as fast as she could up the dirtier darker street called Golden Square.

At number nine she paused and timidly peeped in at the half-open door.

The house was cleaner and tidier-looking than others in the neighbourhood, and perhaps was in better repair, but poverty, hard grinding poverty, was as visible in it as in its surroundings.

The door opened into a small scantily-furnished room, in which the smell of leather predominated.

At the farthest end, with boots and shoes all needing repair scattered around, a white-haired old man seated on his bench was busily plying his task. A candle placed on a three-legged stool burning brightly in front of him.

It was Mr. Barker, old Meg's landlord, generally known as Big Ben the cobbler.

He did not notice Nellie standing on the threshold, but was singing blithely and loudly to himself—

Upon the plains of Flanders  
Our fathers long ago,  
They fought like Alexanders  
Beneath old Marlboro';  
And still in fields of conquest  
Our valour bright has shone,

With Wolfe, and Abercrombie,  
And Moore, and Wellington.  
Whack fol the rol, the riddle rol.

But suddenly catching a glimpse of the little figure before him he exclaimed—

"Why, lassie; you're the very one I want. Come in, child, and shut the door, or the draught 'll put my candle out. No, no!" as pale and frightened she glanced up in his face. "They're all right upstairs; nothing the matter with them; but I've got something for you."

He laid down the boot he was welting, took down a small rose-tree in the reddest of pots from a high shelf, and put it into her hands.

"I bought it to-day from a man with a barrer. He says it will bloom, and some buds will soon be showing. Keep it warm, and I daresay they will some day or other. And then," and he laughed a merry hearty laugh, "there'll be roses in Golden Square. Who'd think it?"

"Oh! Mr. Barker," and Nellie's face flushed with delight; "do you really mean this for me? It seems too beautiful to take from you."

"Aye, aye, it's for you, and little enough to give; but run upstairs and get your wet things off. Why, child," as he noticed the wet trickling down her thin well-worn frock, and her wretched boots soaked through, "what a night for you to be out! But one mustn't think of the weather



when the bread's to be earned. Must they, Nell? So run away, and if you like to come down and read me a chapter before going to bed I'll be glad enough to hear it. Of course Mrs. Maybrick and Birdie will come with you;" and as the child thanked him and promised to come he returned to his bench, snuffed the candle with his fingers, and went on with his work.

The stairs were crooked, dark, and narrow, and creaked even under Nellie's light weight; but as she ascended them, laden with her purchases, her basket of flowers, and the rose-tree, a door on the upper landing opened, and Birdie's face peeped over the banisters.

"Oh! Nellie," she cried, "is it you? I am so glad you're back. We thought you were going to be late again to-night;" and she ran down the stairs to fling her arms around her and give a loving kiss.

"And Meg's got such a fire!" she continued excitedly. "A real big one. She's been out at work to-day, and the lady gave her a shilling and some coals. And do you know," and the child's voice sank to a whisper, "there's sausages to-night for supper—won't you like them? But oh, my! what a lot of things you've got. Here, I'll take this," and seizing a parcel she hurried Nellie up the stairs into the warm room.

"There, now, isn't that a good fire, and isn't the room nice?"

And warm and pleasant enough it seemed to hungry weary Nellie, and glad enough was she to be there out of the cold wet dreary streets, and to know she would not have to go out again until the morning.

The room was small, with but little furniture to speak of, but it was clean, tidy, and there was a look of home about it.

It was true the two chairs in it were rickety: the leg of one was broken so that it required care and caution to sit upon it, and when seated to preserve one's equilibrium: the table, too, was rather unsteady, and had to be propped against the wall; but now with a clean cloth spread over it and the tea-things laid out for the evening meal it looked cosy enough.

The fire burned brightly, the kettle on the hob was singing its loudest, and flickering lights and shadows danced on wall and ceiling, and as the red flame leaped up every now and then, it made all around glow with its ruddy light.

Nellie gently put down the rose-tree, which was pounced upon immediately by her sister.

"Oh! Nell, where did you get this? Oh, my! ain't it lovely? And fancy, it's out in green leaves already! Here, Meg, Meg! do come and look at it."

"Dear heart!" cried Meg, who was a clean tidy-looking old woman, with a kind pleasant

face, snow-white hair, and cheeks as rosy as a winter's apple. "Dear heart! who's given you that? It's been reared in a green-house, and must be kept warm or it will wither. But take off your wet things; there's your old frock to put on, it isn't much to look at, but it's dry, and that's everything. And while you're telling us what you've done to-day I'll get the frying-pan and cook some sausages I brought home," and so while Birdie took her damp dress and drenched shawl from her, Nellie told them all that had happened to her. And thankful was she to rest for a few minutes in front of the fire and watch Meg, who was making the tea. First measuring two spoonfuls carefully she put them into the tea-pot, filled up the same with boiling water, and stood it on the hob to draw while she cut some slices of bread, and then bade the children come to supper, and Nellie to say "grace,"—which she reverently did, with bowed head and clasped hands, and then drew one of the rickety chairs towards the table, Birdie nestling on a low stool by her side, and the next moment Meg had plunged a fork into the largest and most spluttering sausage, and transferred it to her plate.

"There, eat it, child; you've been all day in the cold, and Birdie and I, thank God, have been in shelter, with enough to eat and to spare."

"Yes, Nell," said the child; "I had some dinner

with Mr. Barker. When he found I was alone he called me down; and my! there was such a dinner! Roast pork with crackling, and pease-pudding he got at the cook-shop."

"Yes," said Meg, putting another sausage on to Nellie's plate. "He heard Mrs. Newton sent for me, in a hurry like, and so he said I was not to bother about his dinner, he would go out and buy something."

Here it may be mentioned Mr. Barker, having lost his wife, allowed Meg to have the room upstairs rent-free, on condition she cleaned his room, kept it tidy, and cooked his meals.

"And I hope, Birdie, you made a good dinner?" said Nellie.

"Pretty well," was the reply, as the child leant her head against her sister's chair, and softly stole her hand into hers.

"But you're eating nothing," cried old Meg; "you've not tasted even a bit of bread. Dear heart, what is the matter?"

"I don't care for anything," was all Birdie answered, as she laid her plate and its untouched contents on the table, and, sinking down by Nellie's side, gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

An inexpressible fear, a sickening dread, suddenly possessed Nellie, and, pushing back her chair, she looked down on the little face.

By the ruddy blaze she noticed for the first

time how pale and thin it had grown—how sweet and wistful the expression of the large blue, gentle eyes.

It was little Birdie, sweet six-years-old Birdie—the darling her dying mother only three short months ago had implored her to watch over and befriend.

“Take care of Birdie!” were almost her dying words; and faithfully and unselfishly had she endeavoured, as far as her childish exertions enabled her, to fulfil that dying bequest. But what made the little face so altered?—the far-off look in those dear eyes, and the little hand enfolded in her own so hot, and dry, and feverish?

“Birdie,” she whispered, “is there anything the matter with you? Don’t you feel well?”

“Oh! yes, Nell,” was the reply. “I’m only tired. I think I’m always tired now; but I want to go down to Mr. Barker’s to-night, and sing that pretty hymn—

‘The pearly gates are open wide,  
I see the bright array;  
On either side the angels glide,  
To keep the shining way.’

And, Nellie, you will read, won’t you? a nice chapter all about heaven, where mother is. She’s no hard work there, or cries when she’s no money and we’ve no bread to eat; and she doesn’t go

out in the rain or snow, and come home too tired to speak to us. No, no, Nellie, she's happy there, and doesn't feel pain or trouble, does she?"

"No," said Nellie, softly. "But why do you talk so, Birdie, darling?"

"I don't know," was the reply; "but heaven must be a beautiful place, and I hope God will let me go there soon. I want to be with mother."

"Ah! there is Mr. Barker calling us. He wants us to come down at once," and old Meg rose and, piling up the empty plates and cups and saucers, raked out the fire, and bade the children follow her; and as Nellie, with Birdie's hand clasped tightly in her own, obeyed, she felt thankful her kind old friend had been too busy finishing her supper to have heard words that now, with sad and sorrowful misgiving, pressed so heavily on her heart.





## CHAPTER III.

### BIG BEN TELLS HOW HE WENT SOLDIERING.

**T**HE hearth was swept up, an extra shovel of coals thrown on the fire, the boots and shoes collected and piled up in a corner of the room, and Mr. Barker, candle in hand, at the foot of the stairs, awaited his guests.

He was a fine-looking old man—every inch a soldier, straight and erect as a dart, with a pair of keen gray eyes, overhung by bushy gray eyebrows. He was well known, and about the only man feared and respected by those around; for, kind and gentle as he appeared usually to be to women and children, he had a sharp tongue and a heavy fist, and was not the man to brook impudence or interference from the worthless roughs of the neighbourhood.

Strange as it seems, such is the inconsistency of human nature, it is an undoubted fact, the more cowardly and debased a man is, the more he admires and respects courage in another, and

everyone knew that Big Ben had been a brave, gallant soldier, and had faithfully served his country.

"There, take care, little un," he cried, as Birdie, catching her foot in the well-worn stair, would have fallen had not Nellie caught her.

"Come down slowly. Never be in a hurry when there's no occasion. Many a mistake has been made in life from being in too great a hurry. There, come in; I've a good fire, and that's something this cold night, and if you're hungry, and by and by could fancy a bit, there's cold pork and pease-pudding in the cupboard, though this little lassie was too dainty to eat it; eh?" and he glanced smilingly at old Meg. "Turned up her nose at it. Shocking, isn't it?"

"Oh! please sir," began Nellie, her eyes full of tears, and drawing little Birdie closer to her, "she isn't dainty, but," and she stopped as if afraid to give utterance to the fear that so cruelly beset her.

"Well?"

"I don't think she's quite the thing to-day. She wouldn't eat any supper."

"No," cried old Meg; "I don't think the child is as she should be. She seems mopy and out of sorts."

"Well, sit ye down, draw your chairs to the fire; and Nellie, lassie, take your sister on your



lap, if you can nurse her, and chat away while I finish a bit of work I want to get done to-night. There, don't mind me. Oh! by the by, I was forgetting; perhaps she would like this," and he opened the cupboard opposite to where Nellie was sitting and took out a large, golden ripe orange.

Little Birdie's blue eyes glistened as she gratefully accepted it; and as Nellie peeled and quartered the delicious fruit, even Meg was struck by the evident relish and avidity with which she devoured it.

"Why, child," said Big Ben, as taking his place on his bench, he picked up a boot and sticking it between his knees, sole upwards, watched her in astonishment, "are you so thirsty, little un?"

"Yes," said Meg, pulling out her knitting and beginning to count her stitches; "she's been drinking cold tea, and water, and a drop of milk I saved for her, all the evening."

"Milk!" exclaimed Mr. Barker, bringing his fist down upon the sole with all his might. "Milk! what do you call such stuff in London? Sky-blue from the cow with the iron tail. Why there's no real milk sold here; nothing to do that child good or strengthen her. Milk, indeed!" and he looked anxiously on Birdie's flushed cheeks and thin face. "Ah! lassie, you should have the fresh milk and rich cream I had as a boy."

"Was it very good?" inquired Birdie.

"Good! ah, wasn't it? But, there, you should have seen my home; it was in such a pretty village, and was a real Kentish farm, with orchards of cherry, pear, and apple trees. Ah!" and winding a piece of waxed thread round and round his fingers, the old soldier gazed dreamily at the fire. "Dear me, how plain I can see it all now, and fancy myself a boy again! There's the old house with its tall chimneys, thatched roof, and latticed windows with roses and all sorts of pretty creepers growing about them; and the red-tiled sheds and big barns beyond it, and the pleasant meadows with the cows and sheep in them, and the tall elm trees, where the rooks built every year. What a noisy lot they were! How often as a little chap have I clambered up and carried off their nests! And the river, dear me, I can see it now, with its queer old broken bridge, and the old mill with its splashing wheel; and the quiet little village, with its ivied church; and Parson Needham, a good old man, but what long dry sermons he gave, and wasn't he down upon us youngsters if we laughed in church. And old Jacob Too-good the clerk—I think I can see him now awaking up from a nap at the end of the sermon, and can hear his loud A-m-en. Dead and gone, all of 'em. Dead and gone many a long day."

"But what a comfortable home to leave for soldiering!" said old Meg.

"Right you are, Mrs Maybrick, and I think so now. You see I was a harum-scarum, wild sort of a chap as would settle to nothing. My home and village life were too dull for me. I wanted, like most youngsters, to see the world; and I've had my wish and had my share of its hard knocks, its ups and downs."

"But why choose a soldier's life, Mr. Barker?"

"Come now, missus, I'm not going to repent of that. No, no. Where'd you be, or the queen on her throne, God bless her! if it wasn't for her soldiers and sailors. No, no, it's not that I'm sorry for. It's disobeying mother and the trouble I was to her—the best, the kindest mother ever son had. Poor dear, she's gone to her rest many a long year ago; but somehow, thinking of her, I seem to forget I'm an old man, come nearly to the end of life's long march, and fancy myself a boy again and back in the old home with her. Well, you see, this is how I went soldiering. Father was dead, and mother carried on the farm—Cherry Tree was what it was called—and I was the eldest, and she wanted me to step into my father's place and take the management of it, and be a comfort to her and set a good example to my young brother and sister. But I hated the humdrum life, and was always in scrapes and giving her heartaches enough; and one day when she and I had some words—it was only about

selling her favourite cow—I walked out of the house in a temper, and swore I'd never set foot in it again. Well, I started off, to go goodness knows where, and then I got tired and lay down under Farmer Owen's hay-rick. Well, I lit my pipe, that I do remember, and must have fallen asleep. I don't remember how long I slept, but when I awoke the sun was high in the heavens, my pipe fallen out of my mouth, and the rick all aflame. There was no one about, and like a stupid, I was so frightened I didn't wait to see how much was destroyed, but took to my heels and away I ran; and, as luck would have it, just as I turned into the village I fell in with a recruiting sergeant and his men, and seeing me a tall, likely sort of a chap he had his eye precious sharp upon me, and it didn't take long, as you may think, to talk me over to take the queen's shilling. And so I listed; and with bright streamers in my hat, and honour and glory before me, I left my home for a soldier's life."

"And, Mr. Barker," said Nellie, "did you ever see your mother again?"

"Aye, aye, lassie, that I did, but not for many a long day to come. I'd listed in the 88th Regiment, the Connaught Rangers, as they call them, as fine and gallant a lot as there's in the queen's service. I was sent to headquarters, and passed all right, and then I wrote to mother telling her

what I'd done, and asking her to pay old Farmer Owen for the damage done to his hay-rick, which she did. It wasn't much, for some labourers passing soon put the fire out. Poor soul, she wanted then to buy my discharge and have me home again, but I liked my new life too well to return to the farm; so I kept a-soldiering, and after knocking about here, there, and everywhere, the Crimean war broke out.

"You're too young, little uns, to understand much about it, and I can't well explain, but it came to this: Old Nicholas, Emperor of the Rooshians, wanted a place called Constantinople, and its king, or sultan as he was called, wouldn't give it up, and so to get it the Rooshians began to fight with him.

"Well, the English wasn't going to see the poor little chap put on by such a powerful foe, so the British Lion gave a roar that was heard throughout Europe, and that roar meant war.

"The French joined us, and off we went to help the poor frightened sultan and his people, the Turks as they are called; and among the first regiments sent from England was 'The Rangers.' So I wrote to mother asking her and my brother Ted and sister Anne to come and bid me good-bye."

"And did they come?" asked Meg.

"Aye, aye, Mrs. Maybrick, they came fast

enough," and here Big Ben's voice faltered, and tears were standing thick and glistening in the eyes gazing so steadily into the fire.

"Mother was too much cut up to say much, but she forgave me and blessed me. Blessed me, 'the ne'er do weel,' who had been such a trouble to her, and went from her in an evil temper. Ah! she was a good woman, too good for the likes of me, and at the parting moment she gave me a little Bible and asked me to keep it for her sake, and read a chapter out of it every day."

"And did you, Mr. Barker?" said little Birdie.

"I did, child. I kept my promise to her, and do you know that little book saved my life."

"Saved your life!" cried Nellie. "Oh! do tell us how?"

"Well, you see, I always carried it about with me, just here in my breast pocket, and it was after the battle of the Alma I found one of the enemy's bullets lodged in the leaves, so you see mother's last gift carried a blessing with it."

"What a dreadful thing is war!" said old Meg with a shudder.

"You are right there, but a soldier mustn't think of its horrors or be cast down; he must only go where his duty calls him, knowing his life is as safe there in his Maker's hands as it would be in his own peaceful home."

"And did you ever hear a real cannon, Mr. Barker?" asked little Birdie, who, with his eyes fixed on the old soldier's face, was listening intently to every word.

"Yes, child, and fired 'em off scores of times."

"Please, Mr. Barker," broke in Nellie, "did you get wounded there? for Mrs. O'Brien told me you had been hurt in a battle."

"Ah! little lassie, that was at Inkerman," and he pointed to his knee; "that was from a ball that lamed me and invalidated me from the service."

"Dear me, how it all comes back to me! the din and awful noise of that battle I couldn't forget, the continued roar of musketry, the bullets whizzing past, the big shells bursting—'Whistling Dicks' we called 'em from the noise they made—the cries of the wounded, and the horrible screeching yell of the Rooshians—but there, there, that's enough; you look skeered, and I've no right to frighten you all and give you bad dreams."

"Oh! but we like to listen," cried Nellie excitedly. "Do go on."

But Big Ben had said enough, and was anxious to change the conversation.

He had risen, with the corner of his leathern apron tucked in the string that went round his waist, but now he sat down again on his bench,

and, picking up the boot he had dropped, took his awl and began to work.

Little Birdie looked disappointed, she and Nellie had been so interested, it was like hearing only half a story and then the book being closed and put away; so gathering courage from the wistful look of Nellie's face, that seemed to express the most intense regret at Mr. Barker's abrupt termination, she suddenly exclaimed—

"Please, sir, didn't you see your mother again after that?"

"Ah! little un," was the reply, "that's just where I feel it. No; by the time I was let out of hospital mother and Ted were dead. Mother had been ailing a long time, only I was too ill to be told of it; Ted wasn't long after her."

"And where was your sister?" asked Meg.

"She married and left the place, and whether it were she or her husband I don't know, but they didn't seem to want me. I suppose, like most people, poor relations are not wanted when one gets up in the world, so my wife and I settled here. She's dead, poor thing, but let's talk of something else. Come, lassie, how's the rose-tree?"

"Oh! it's lovely," cried Nellie, "I've put it upon the chest of drawers, and Birdie will look after it."

"Yes, Mr. Barker;" and the child, raising herself in Nellie's arms, gave a happy laugh.



"I'm going to see to it, and Nellie's promised me the first flower that blooms."

The first flower that blooms! Ah! little Birdie, fairer blossoms than Nellie's rose will then be thine—flowers of deathless unfading beauty.





## CHAPTER IV.

### OLD MEG HAS A SECRET.



FOR a few moments there was a pause, broken only by the click of Mrs. Maybrick's knitting needles and the old clock in the corner striking the hours.

"Oh, dear!" cried Meg starting up. "Eight o'clock; it's time to be thinking of bed."

"Don't go," replied Mr. Barker, "it's early yet, unless the little uns are tired; I must finish this work to-night; just stay until I've done and Nellie will read us a chapter. You see my sight ain't very good for print. I wish now I'd been more a lad for my books; I'd have got on better in the service, but I never was much of a hand at letters or figures. Ah, eddication's a fine thing; there's nothing like it. Stick to your books, children; learn all you can when young, and your life will be the happier and more useful."

"There, sit down again, ma'am, and we'll have a chapter; that little lassie," pointing to Nellie,

"reads so nicely and gets over the hard words—I always halt when I come to them—and her little sister will sing us a hymn. She's a sweet voice, fresh and clear as a lark's. It's you, little Birdie, I mean, you sing like an angel. Dear me! how like she is to her mother! t'other one isn't a bit; one wouldn't think they were sisters."

And certainly no two children could less resemble each other.

Birdie clasped in Nellie's arms, with her small, pink and white babyish face, blue eyes, and pretty fair clustering curls. Nellie, pale and serious, with large dark radiant eyes, sweet sensitive mouth, and rich brown hair, that, escaping the string that bound it, fell in heavy wavy masses around her.

"Now, say, are they alike?" and Big Ben looked earnestly at Meg.

She appeared to know how intently he was watching her, for she glanced up quickly; a half uttered exclamation escaped her, and then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, she pursed up her lips and remained silent.

"Well, not a bit alike, are they?"

"How do I know?" she answered sharply.

"Come, come, Mrs. Maybrick, don't flurry yourself," and the keen gray eyes met hers with a kindly friendly expression. "Don't put yourself out, there's a good woman; I'm not going to ask

what you'd rather not tell me or pry into your affairs."

She looked quickly up with such a pleasant grateful smile on her kind old face.

"Indeed I only wish I could tell you, but a secret's a secret as long as you keep it to yourself. Isn't it?"

"Of course," was the reply. "Don't say another word about it. Come, little Birdie, sing us that pretty hymn."

"Which one?" she asked.

"That one about Heaven," whispered Nellie, "the one you're so fond of."

"Ah! dear heart! Yes, it was your mother's favourite, poor dear."

"But she's not poor now, Meg," said the child softly. "She doesn't want money or anything to eat, and she's always with Jesus and the angels."

The tears rose to Nellie's eyes; Birdie had said almost the same thing before that evening. What could she mean? But her sad thoughts were interrupted by the child's sweet voice filling the room with a burst of richest melody, clear and joyous as earthly music could be.

The pearly gates are open wide,  
I see the bright array,  
On either side the angels glide,  
To keep the shining way.

And little children learn to find  
 The way by angels trod,  
 Where Christ's redeemed together walk  
 The shining way of God.

When storms arise, and darkness clouds  
 The faithful pilgrim's way,  
 On either side the angels glide,  
 To keep the shining way.  
 And brighter gleams the morning light  
 Behind the gentle rod,  
 For Christ's redeemed more clearly see  
 The shining way to God.

And soon they walk the golden streets,  
 Not wearied or alone,  
 On either side the angels glide,  
 To lead them to the throne.  
 And then they wear a starry crown,  
 Who once did toil and plod,  
 For Christ's redeemed with angels tread  
 The shining way to God.

"That's a very pretty hymn," said Big Ben, who had laid aside his work to listen to it. "A very pretty one. I don't wonder your mother liked it. Ah! she was a good woman."

"Never a better," said old Meg.

Nellie's cheeks flushed with delight at hearing the praises of one loved so tenderly, and eagerly she bent forward to listen.

"You were an old friend of hers, weren't you?" asked the cobbler.

"I knew her from childhood, when she wasn't

a bit higher than little Birdie. Ah! Mr. Barker, when you were speaking of your home I thought how different it was to mine and Barbara's. It was no quiet spot, with green trees and yellow cornfields; oh dear, no! We lived far away on the wild Cornish coast in a small hamlet called St. Bee's. It was called a village, but was nothing more than a straggling row of cottages—tarry, blackened timbered, and weather-beaten—perched on a high cliff overlooking the sea, and exposed to the boisterous winds, that blew high and wild enough winter and summer there. Ah! dear hearts, while I tell you of my home I can fancy myself back again listening to the sea, the moaning waves, and the sea-birds' cry.

"We knew very little of the world outside, for the cliffs rose between us and it, and seemed to shut us out from it. Strangers seldom came anigh us, for it was no easy matter to climb the steep turf, and dry grass is as slippery and smooth as glass, and as dangerous to tread upon. So we lived a lonely life—the men busy mending their nets and looking after their lobster pots, the women spinning or knitting or tidying their cottages. I was married and getting on in years when Barbara—pretty, gentle Barbara Harvey—married David Gray, and came to live in the cottage nearest to us. As I had seen her a wee toddling mite, so I saw her—her—"

Here Meg suddenly paused and pointed to the children opposite to her.

"Well, those little ones, begin to trot about, and I grew to love them, and they were as dear to me as if they were mine."

"But did you go to church?" said Birdie, her blue eyes fixed on old Meg.

"Dear heart! what a question to ask! But it's just like her; she's always thinking of church and what is good. Yes, dear, of course we went. We used to go every Sunday, the women in warm cloaks, the men in blue jerseys and bright-coloured neckerchiefs, all neat and tidy-like. It was an out-of-the-way place, far over the cliffs, but the nearest to us for miles. I don't know who had built it, but it was a very old, weather-beaten, gray church, with a queer-looking steeple, just like an extinguisher. The old folks in my day said the church had once stood in the centre of a village, but the waves and shingle had washed the village away and left the church standing close to the sea, with a dreary patch of ground behind it, where those we loved and lost were buried. Dear hearts! I can see it plain enough as I speak. Oh! such a lonely spot, with the rough-hewn grave-stones half covered with the rank grass, nearly all of them with the saddest of words to a sailor's wife, 'Drowned' or 'Lost at sea,' carved on the blackened mossy stone.

"But we always looked forward to Sunday. We knew that day our minister, Mr. Tregarthen, wouldn't fail to come and give us a sermon and a friendly chat afterwards, and if we were in trouble he'd advise us and speak many a word of comfort. 'I've come,' he would say, 'to bring a message from Christ the Lord, the friend of fishermen, the toilers of the sea,' and then he'd give us a hymn or a text, something we might take back to those who were old or sick or couldn't come, and that we might talk over when the men mended their nets, or we were gathered around the winter's fire."

"But what brought you and Mrs. Gray to London?" said Big Ben, who was so interested in Meg's narration that he had dropped the boot he was soleing and sat with his hands before him, a rare occurrence for one who hated an idle moment.

"Ah! I'm coming to that," replied Mrs. Maybrick with a sigh. "Well, it was just in this way. It had been a bad season; little or no fish had come into the bay, and October had set in wet and stormy. It was just the last day of the month, and Davie Gray and my husband had both been out since daybreak in their new boat—for they went partners like—*The Pride of the Ocean*. Barbara had been in and out to me a dozen times, telling me a storm, she was sure, was



coming on and they'd be caught in it. At first I laughed at her being so uneasy and anxious, but as the day wore on I began to get a bit afraid too. Dark clouds began to gather, and winds and waves roar. Women and children were hastening down to the beach, looking grave and serious enough.

"Barbara and I couldn't sit in the house; it rocked as if it would come to pieces, and the sound of the tempest howling around it and down the chimney was too terrible to listen to. So we threw our shawls on and hurried down the narrow path in the cliff that led to the strand below. But by the time we got there the daylight, in a red angry sunset, had faded, and evening set in with a darkness thick and dense as midnight. Dear hearts! I must not dwell on the horrors of that long, awful night. When the dawn broke we knew the worst."

"Oh! tell us, Meg," cried Nellie breathlessly. "Daddy was drowned, wasn't he?"

There was silence for a moment, and then Meg, in a broken voice, continued.

"Yes, child! *The Pride of the Ocean* had drifted in keel uppermost, sails torn and rudder gone—"

"And," asked Big Ben, with a sudden cough and husky voice, "were *they* found?"

"Yes! God was good. He gave us back our

dead, and we laid them to rest in the little church-yard by the sea."

And old Meg buried her face in her hands and burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

"But I mustn't give way like this; it's wrong of me, because there's a joyful resurrection to look forward to, when we shall meet again, never more to be parted.

"But let me tell you how we came to London. Barbara wouldn't leave me and I wouldn't leave Barbara; and a nephew of mine wrote telling me he was doing a good business, and if I came to London he would find work for us both. So I took the little money Maybrick and I had saved and we came. Ah! it was a disappointment, because we had broken up our little homes, and when we got here to this big, strange city, instead of a business and he helping us we found he had gone off to America a bankrupt, and our little money soon went, and we were thankful of the room, Mr. Barker, you offered us and the dear children.

"You know the rest. Barbara—gentle, tender-hearted Barbara—drooped and faded. She worked her hardest at her needle and tried to do her best, but she was not strong enough to rough it, and God in mercy took her. Now, I've told you my story, and you know, Mr. Barker, why these children are so dear to me, and why, as far as my

strength allows me, I try and work for them and take the place of her who's gone."

"Indeed I do, Mrs. Maybrick, and respect you or any one as is true to his comrade and sticks to him," and Big Ben went up to her and shook her heartily by the hand. "I've not much but my pension and what I earn. Isn't it a good thing I learned to be a cobbler? I never thought I should take to that trade, but I'm thankful I did learn it and able to make an honest penny by it; and while I have one neither you or the little uns shall want a roof overhead or a crust of bread to eat."

"What a nice evening this has been!" whispered Birdie, "to hear all about mother and daddy and Mr. Barker."

"What's about me, little lassie?" cried Big Ben, turning away from Meg, who, too overpowered to speak, was having her little cry out. "What about me?"

"Birdie liked to hear about your being a soldier, sir."

Mr. Barker looked pleased at his adventures having interested the children.

"Did you really like to listen to them?" he asked.

"Oh! yes," said Nellie excitedly; "and I only wish—"

"Wish what, little lassie?"

"Poor Mickey had been here. He is so fond of real true stories."

"Well, little uns, I'll tell you what I'll do," and the old soldier seemed as excited as the children. "I like Mrs. O'Brien; she's a civil, obliging little body, and the poor little fellow must have a dull time of it. So I'll get you to tidy up the place a bit, and buy a cake and anything else you like, and I'll give a tea-party."

"A what?" exclaimed the children in astonishment.

"A tea-party. Yes! I mean it, and Nell shall pour out tea, and we'll invite people properly. There's Mrs. Maybrick and Mrs. O'Brien and Mickey, and who else? Come, Birdie."

But Birdie was lost in amazement and could think of no one, so Nellie suggested Mrs. Field and her children. She would not mention Polly Matthews, knowing she was too wild and rough to be a favourite with Mr. Barker.

"Aye, aye, lassie, they shall come, and we'll have everything in order and plenty to eat—a big cake, some cold ham or beef, shrimps, and what do you say to a pot of jam or marmalade? And is there anything else?"

But the children were too excited and delighted to think of more good things. Never in their wildest imagination had they thought of giving a real party, inviting people, and expecting them

at a certain time; and nine o'clock striking, and the kind-hearted cobbler having seen he had succeeded in diverting their thoughts from Meg's sad story, produced the Bible and asked Nellie to read a chapter.

"Which shall it be?" she asked.

"Read all about heaven," whispered Birdie; "I like that best."

And so turning to the Revelation she read, slowly and reverently, the glorious and unequalled description of the home God has prepared for those who love him.

"Thank ye, lassie," said Big Ben when she closed the book; "that is something comforting and to think about."

"Yes," said old Meg, "and to feel and know for certain those we mourn for here are safely landed on a shore where no storms or waves can harm them."

"I tell you what it is," replied the old soldier, "life seems to me like being listed, then learning our duties, trying our best to do 'em as they should be done, serving our time, and then getting ready for the great parade, where we must all answer our last roll-call. It doesn't do to go to parade here with a dirty coat or a button wanting here and there, or a busted boot. We must all be smart and trim, fit for inspection; but we don't think enough of preparing ourselves and

being all right for the inspection of our great Captain. I often think of that, and I'm sure if others did too, there'd be more ready for his coming, and not be found neglecting their duty or sleeping at their post. But the little uns look tired and Birdie is yawning. There, good-night, and thank ye for coming so kind and neighbourly. It cheers me up a bit, I can tell you; and, children, you won't forget the tea-party?"

But there was no fear of their doing so, for long after old Meg was sleeping soundly in her bed, in the corner opposite to the small one occupied by Nellie and little Birdie, the former was awakened by the child softly whispering:

"Nellie, don't forget, we've bread and butter and water-cresses at Mr Barker's tea-party."





## CHAPTER V.

### LINA GETS INTO "A TANTRUM."



THE long cold winter had passed away and an April sun was shining.

The day had been wet and showery, but as the afternoon wore on the dark clouds had disappeared, and golden sunbeams were streaming brightly through the open window of the ink-stained, ink-bespattered, school-room of a large rambling old-fashioned place called The Manor House.

At a table strewn with slates, books, and copy-books, two girls were sitting busily engaged in preparing their lessons for the next day.

They were Maude, better known as Gip North, and her sister Lina.

Gip, a girl of about twelve, was a bright dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked, happy-looking child. Lina, two years younger, fairer, and smaller featured, might have been considered the most attractive of the two had her face been less fretful and discontented in its expression.

"What o'clock is it?" said Gip, glancing at her sister and indulging in a prolonged yawn.

"How can I tell?" was the somewhat peevish reply, "you know I've no watch."

"Well, I only hope it is nearly tea-time, I am so tired," and Gip lifted her eyes from the book before her, and looked wistfully across the meadows to the cricket-field where a great match was being played by happy excited boys, all eager and intent on the game.

"Oh! Lina," she exclaimed, as throwing her book aside she went to the window, and, leaning her arms on the sill, gazed around, "do come here. Does not everything look fresh and pretty after the rain? and hark! how the birds are singing."

But Lina was not so easily pleased, for she only remarked:

"I don't know what there is to look at—rain, rain, all the day, and just now a bit of sunshine when it's too late to go out. I call the weather horrid, nothing to make a fuss about; but, there, it's just like you."

"Oh! Lina, don't be cross, I do not want to make a fuss, dear, but the garden does look lovely; put away your lesson and come and look at it."

"Put it away!" cried Lina wrathfully; "it's all very well for you, you learn nothing. Miss



Wharton always spares your being bothered; it's me she gives the hard, horrid things to learn."

"Oh! Lina!" and Gip turned a troubled face to her sister. She knew too well the little control she had over her temper, and feared an outburst of passion.

"You know, dear," she continued gently, "Miss Wharton generally gives us the same lessons to learn, and always says how much quicker you are, and how much better you remember them."

"Nasty horrid things!" and the Roman History was flung to the other end of the room. "I can't see the use of learning such rubbish—Augustus Cæsar, Tiberius Cæsar, Caligula. Go! I hate you all, horrid old fogies. I don't believe one of you ever lived. I hate history, it was only made up to give us ever so much more to learn—nasty dry stuff—it's hard enough and stupid enough to read, let alone get off by heart; and I won't—I won't do any more."

"Well, never mind," replied her sister, "come to the window, listen to the hurrahs. I almost think I can hear Norman's voice. There's a shout; oh! I hope his side has won."

In a moment Lina was by her side, listening as eagerly and excitedly as herself. If there was a being she loved, and for whose sake she would try and subdue her irritable temper, it was her brother Norman. No matter what she was to

others (and she could be annoying and disagreeable enough), she never wished to vex him, or have, as she called it, "a lecture from him."

"Gip, I do believe his side has won; won't it be jolly to write the news to papa and mama? Aunt Elsie says we may write long letters to them by the next mail. Fancy, they've been gone a week to-day; hasn't the time passed quick?"

But Gip could not answer, to her the days had appeared to pass so slowly, and although she tried not to think of it, it seemed dreadful to look forward to weeks, months, and probably years before she could see their dear faces again.

Only a week before, Colonel and Mrs. North had sailed for India, where the regiment of the former was stationed, leaving their four children to the care of their aunt, Mrs. Howard, Mrs. North's sister, at the old Manor House. Ah! it had been a sad parting, for parents and children both knew time might bring many changes before they met again.

"I say, Gip," exclaimed Lina, "do you think we might ask auntie to let us have one run, just down the gravel path, and go and meet Norman. I do want to hear if he has won. I don't understand cricket a bit, do you?"

"No," replied Gip, "I know it's all runs, and bats and wickets, and I think they count some-

thing. But Norman says it's only for boys to play, so I suppose girls are not expected to learn much about it. Oh! hark! there are cheers; and doesn't the old church, with the woods behind it, look pretty in the sunshine?"

But Lina did not heed the boys hurrahing or the distant landscape, for with a glad cry, "Here's auntie," she sprang to the side of a tall graceful lady, dressed in deep mourning, who at that moment had entered the room.

"Oh! auntie, I am so glad you've come; we've finished our lessons, and learned all Miss Wharton gave us for to-morrow, and it's so fine, may we have a run, just one tiny scamper down the path, to meet Norman?"

"But it has rained so much, my child, and may be too damp."

"Oh! but the gravel path is dry, and we won't go on the grass. Will we, Gip? We promise you we won't—do, please, let us go."

Mrs. Howard smiled, such a sad, tender, sweet smile, and laying her hand on Lina's curly head, said, "If you promise not to venture on the wet grass you may go, but you must not remain out long, it is nearly tea-time, and do not make a noise under Miss Wharton's window, for she has a headache, and is lying down. But stay. Lina, is that book on the floor yonder your Roman History I covered this morning for you?"

"Yes, auntie, I—I flung it there."

"Lina, my dear child," replied her aunt, "in a temper again, I fear!"

"Well, I couldn't help it," was the answer in an apologetic tone, "I couldn't learn those horrid emperors' names, such stupid men to have them; but I'll pick it up and won't do so again. There now, may we go?"

Aunt Elsie sighed as she gave the desired permission, and watched the children run joyously down the stairs, stopping only for a moment to seize each a hat and jacket kept for garden wear in a small cupboard off the hall, and then, with happy voices and merry laugh, hurry past the window towards the cricket-field.

To tell the truth, tenderly as she was attached to them, Mrs. Howard already began to feel the responsibility imposed on her by promising to take the charge of her sister's children. Miss Wharton, a staid, efficient governess, certainly was there to superintend their education, and help her to take care of them; but Aunt Elsie felt, strict as Miss Wharton was, her influence was not strong enough to check Lina's petulant bursts of temper or soothe her irritable disposition. To keep her in the school-room as a punishment, or to write a dozen French exercises, or learn so many columns of spelling, would never teach her to overcome what hereafter would be an evil to

herself and bring misery to those around. It was true Miss Wharton tried to be firm with the child and exact obedience from her, but Aunt Elsie plainly saw she had no power to touch Lina's heart, or awaken in her one feeling of contrition and sincere sorrow.

All she could do was to ask God's help and guidance, and, lifting up her heart in prayer, implore Him to make her, in His own good way, more to resemble Him who left to us the greatest example on earth of meekness and lowliness.

Of Norman she had no fear. Although but fourteen, he had shown in many instances a fine, noble, manly spirit, and was a boy on whose word she could always rely. His tutor, Mr. Grant, spoke of him in the highest terms, as a boy who would never shirk his duty, tell a lie, or do anything mean or dishonourable. And as to Gip, sweet gentle Gip, none knew so well as herself how dear she was to her.

But Aunt Elsie's meditations (for, absorbed in thought, she had not noticed how quickly the time had passed) were interrupted by the bell ringing for tea and Lina bursting into the room.

"Oh, auntie!" she cried, "is it not glorious? Norman has won."

"No, Lina," said her brother as he followed close upon her, "I've not won, but we've beaten the Henley boys; rather a close affair, but an awfully

jolly match. Fancy, auntie, we had forty-five to their thirty-nine. They showed some decent batting and bowled well too, but they were awfully bad fielders. It was our catches that told on them. We had first innings, and a fellow named Brown began bowling, then Archer and Maynard went in; we scored four at first going off. Archer made a splendid swipe, poor Maynard got a duck egg, and Charlton—you know that big tall black-looking fellow—did nothing but block the balls till the over, and the next was a maiden."

"What!" cried Lina, "a girl play cricket with you?"

"No, you goose, a maiden is when you have five balls without a run."

"How many runs did you make?" asked Mrs. Howard, who, although the description of the match and the terms Norman used were as Greek to her, still for his sake evinced an interest in all he said.

"Oh! about five or six, it was not bad considering the bowler, but at last he was no-balled."

"Snow-balled!" exclaimed Gip in amazement.

"There, don't, it's when the bowler gets in front of his line, don't you know? I made a splendid score, got some splendid slogs."

"What horrid words!" said Lina, "cricket can't be a nice game, and I'm sure there's no sense in it."

"That's all you know about it," retorted her brother. "Well, since you don't like it I'll hold my tongue."

But Aunt Elsie and his sisters urging him to tell the remainder, Norman continued:

"There was a little fat fellow bowling. He was awfully artful; sometimes he'd pitch it in in front of my ground, and then he'd send it round the wicket, and sometimes a regular bailer, you know. However, I think eight runs were pretty good, but then came a sneaking daisy cutter, and I was out."

"A lawn mower!" cried Lina, "what did you want with that?"

"There, don't be so silly—a lawn mower indeed! Well, I had two byes and one leg-bye. Some of the fellows were duffers—but there goes the bell for tea. Old Martin is hammering at it, and where's Trottie? I haven't seen her since this morning."

"Oh, Norman, she's all right, finish the cricket match," said Lina, in whose eyes no hero existed like him, or whose prowess would compare to his.

"Oh! there's nothing more to tell, I never played such a hard match. There was such a variety of bowling you never knew what to expect; there were some queer pitches, but it was our catch that did it, they didn't expect we should

make such a good stand. Beaten them! Hurrah! we thrashed them. But there's Trottie calling me."

And as the sound of "Nor, Nor, come a' me" floated down the staircase, the boy, with Lina at his heels, rushed from the room, and with a bound was on the landing of the next flight, and clasping the darling and sunshine of the house, his little sister, in his arms.

A wee toddling mite, just four years old, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, a rose-bud of a mouth, and a cloud of soft curly fair hair, which it was Nurse Weston's pride and constant endeavour to keep in order. She wished to make it smooth, each curl to be as stiff as a cork-screw, and neatly tied with a knot of blue ribbon, but Trottie resented the effort to make her look "a tidy little lady." The hair would, with a shake or two of her pretty little head, fall in the clustering masses of its natural beauty around her dimpled shoulders, and the blue ribbon speedily disappear and generally come to grief.

"Oh, Trottie darling, I've got something lovely for you."

"Oo, tell me, a little pooty."

"No, it's not a pussy, you have one. It's a little white bunny, a real rabbit."

Trottie clapped her hands and screamed with delight.



"Where oo got ittle bunny, me awant it now."

"Oh, you must wait until to-morrow morning; it's too late to go into the barn, but I'll take you, if fine, then to see it."

But wilful Trottie set up a dismal howl and clung to Norman.

"Well," said Lina, "I think it's horrid, Norman, the way you spoil that child; you promised me that rabbit; but it is just like you. It is 'give Trottie this,' 'she shall have that,' all the day, until I declare I am sick of it."

"There, shut up, Lina," replied her brother. "Jack Maynard gave me the rabbit for Trottie, and she shall have it. Shan't you, little one?" and he pressed his lips on the child's soft cheek. "But he's awfully good-natured, and I'll ask him for another for you, if you don't go on as you know you do to Trottie. There, stop it, like a good girl, and hold your tongue."

"I sha'n't," cried Lina, her face white with passion and her eyes ablaze with jealous rage. "I shall talk as much as I like. The rabbit is mine, and Vivian sha'n't have it."

Now if there was one thing Lina knew would vex her little sister, it was to be called by her Christian name of Vivian; she had so teased her about it, laughed at it, and made little Trottie think it so ugly, that any allusion to it distressed the poor little thing beyond measure, and made

her insist on being addressed as Trottie, the pet name Gip had given her.

"Naughty Lina!" she sobbed, nestling closer to Norman. "Me no Vivey, me 'ittle Trottie, oo call me a-that, Nor," and she laid her soft wet face on his shoulder.

"Yes, darling; don't mind her. Lina, I'll tell Aunt Elsie or Miss Wharton. It's a shame to tease the child as you do."

"Oh, you tell-tale! go and do it. And oh, you cry-baby! you may talk as you like, but I don't care that for you,"—and she snapped her fingers in the child's face and laughed loudly.

"Hoity-toity! Miss Lina; what's the matter now?" and Nurse Weston hurrying from the nursery caught her by the arm. "Who don't you care for? For shame, miss, to give way to such tantrums, and get into such a nasty spiteful temper."

"I'm not in a temper; how dare you say such a thing?" and Lina turned angrily towards her.

But nurse was not to be frightened or to submit to her "tantrums." She had lived with Mrs. North since Norman was a baby, and had nursed him and his sisters, and in spite of the trouble Lina had too often given her was devotedly attached to them all, and in every way had proved herself to be a good faithful servant.

She was what the country people around called

"a comfortable body," with a bright happy good-tempered face and an ever-ready smile; but she had a habit of "speaking her mind," and doing it so very plainly that it acted on Lina's excitable nature like "a red rag to a bull," and instead of soothing her generally irritated her the more.

"Well, there, miss; whether you're in a temper or not I don't want a noise made up here. Go down to your tea, and leave Master Norman and baby in peace."

But Lina was not inclined either to leave them or to take her place at the tea-table.

"I don't want any tea," she exclaimed, "and I won't go down-stairs. Norman has given my rabbit away, and that child sha'n't have it, and—"

"There, now, Miss Lina, we've had enough of what you will or won't do. Baby is going to bed, and you may stay up here if you like, but you're not a-coming into the nursery to tease your little sister. Ah! there's the gong; that's for you; there, go at once."

"Me go too," whispered Trottie to Norman; "me come wif oo."

"Of course you shall," was the reply. "Look here, nurse, Trottie is coming down with me. I'll bring her upstairs again in a few minutes, but she wants a cup of milk; don't you, baby?"

"Yes!" was the delighted answer. "Me want

milk; oh! so good," and Trottie quaffed off an imaginary cup. "And some nice"—

"Bread and strawberry jam," suggested her brother.

Trottie burst into a scream of delight, and clapped her pretty dimpled hands.

"Me come back," she cried; "but me go wif Nor and have 'trawberry jam."

"Oh, no! Master Norman, it is too late; she must go to bed;" but with the child in his arms the boy was already half-way down the stairs. Lina slowly and sullenly followed them, and nurse could only watch them as they descended, and wonder, by the expression of Miss Lina's face, what new tantrums she was going to indulge in.

With her hand clasped in Norman's, Trottie, with a shout of happy childish laughter, burst into the room. She was, like Gip, of a sweet forgiving nature, that bore no malice, and in the thought of sitting at the tea-table, and a prospect of bread and jam, had quite forgotten her sister's attempt to vex her.

And how bright and cosy and tempting the tea-table looked! It was a meal Auntie Elsie called high-tea. The children as a rule were small eaters, "with no more appetite than a midge," as Nurse Weston declared, and therefore she generally devised some little extra dainty to coax them to eat.

Mrs. Howard at the head of the table was busy with the cups and saucers, Miss Wharton was cutting some slices of ham, and Gip was putting some jam, actually strawberry jam, into a glass dish, when Trottie rushed in, and with a bound was on her auntie's lap.

"Me come to have tea wif oo!" she exclaimed. "Me no go a-bed!"

"But, my darling," and Aunt Elsie clasped her in her arms and kissed the little upturned face—sweet and fair as an opening flower, "it is so late, time for little girls to be in bed."

But Trottie shook her head and repeated, "Me stay an 'ittle bit."

It was impossible to resist the wistful look, the eager tone, and Aunt Elsie was not the one to resist such baby pleading.

"And you will go to nurse when I tell you, and let her put you to bed, like a good little girl."

"Me velly velly good," said Trottie, with an emphatic nod of her curly head, and slipping down she ran to Norman.

But Gip caught her, and with a kiss declared she should not go until she told her how old she was, Trottie's forgetfulness and mistakes about the same being a standing joke against her.

It was in vain she struggled, Gip held her firmly; so putting her pretty fat little arms around her sister's neck she whispered, "Me six

months old;" then, seeing Gip's look of surprise, she gravely added—"Me tink me not so big."

"Why, I told you this morning you were four years old, and you promised to remember it. Oh! Trottie, what a little silly goose you are."

But the "silly goose" did not wait to hear more, for the next moment she was ensconced in a high chair by Norman's side, and eagerly contemplating a slice of bread and jam that he was cutting into long thin strips for her.

All this time Lina, sullen and with a frown on her face, had remained silent, and Aunt Elsie saw, with a sad sinking of the heart, something had vexed her, and that at any moment an outburst of temper might be expected. Nor was it long before the storm thus brewing burst in a manner as painful to her as it was distressing to the others to witness.

Trottie had finished her milk, and was looking into the depths of the empty cup, when suddenly an idea seemed to strike her, and with a happy laugh she exclaimed:

"Me got a bunny, a big live one! Nor give it a me."

"A rabbit, Trottie!" said Gip, "why, you are a lucky little girl."

"Me go and see 'ittle bunny in the morning. Oo come wif me?" and she turned eagerly to her brother.

"I'll take you," was the reply; "and auntie will come too, and we'll all come and see it."

"Me love my bunny velly velly much. He velly good."

"But it is not yours," cried Lina, "and you sha'n't have it. It is mine."

"Lina," said Miss Wharton, "'sha'n't' is not a proper word for a young lady to use."

"I don't care whether I say sha'n't or won't; but that child," and she pointed to Trottie, "sha'n't have that rabbit, and I won't let her."

"My dear child," began Aunt Elsie, with pale, sad face.

But her gentle voice was unheeded as Lina went on defiantly—

"I tell you it is mine, and I'll keep it."

"Lina, be quiet," said Norman; "shut up, like a good girl, and finish your tea. You shall have a rabbit to-morrow, a stunning beauty—"

But no! Lina was determined to have the one given to Trottie or none.

"I don't want another. I want that one. It is mine, and that spoiled, ill-tempered, horrid child sha'n't have it."

"Lina," said Miss Wharton in a quiet peremptory tone, "your tea shall be sent to you, but go to your room at once. Do you hear what I say?"

"Oh go, Lina," and Gip with tearful eyes stole

to her sister's side and gently laid her hand on her arm.

But Lina flung it off, and starting to her feet gazed with flashing eyes and white face around.

"I don't want to stay here," she cried; "the place has never been the same since mama and papa went away. You were all kind enough then, but now you are all down upon me, and everything I do is wrong. But I won't stand it; I tell you, I won't," and she stamped her foot impatiently. "I'll write and tell them. Oh! it's all through you," and she fixed her angry eyes on Trottie, who nestled closer to Norman; "you horrid selfish little cat. I hate you, I do; but you sha'n't have the rabbit."

But here Miss Wharton's grasp, firm and strong as iron, was laid upon her, and the next moment, with bitter stinging words bursting from her trembling lips, and her whole frame shaking with the mad evil passion that had beset her, Lina found herself standing out in the passage, the dining-room door closed upon her.







## CHAPTER VI

### HOW TROTTIE LOST HER RABBIT.



HERE was silence for a few moments as Miss Wharton resumed her seat, and Aunt Elsie, looking strangely agitated, poured out the tea, broken by Trottie exclaiming—

“Lina naughty; me no love her.”

“Hush!” said Norman. “You are not to say that; it is very wicked.”

The child looked at him with her large blue eyes, and then said softly, “Oo love her? Auntie Elsie love her?”

“Of course,” was the prompt reply.

“Then me love her, and me give her the ’ittle bunny. Auntie,” and sliding out of her chair she hurried to Mrs. Howard, and laying her soft cheek on her shoulder, clasped her round the neck.

“Darling, you shall give it to Lina in the morning.”

“Me give ’ittle bunny now. Lina sick and naughty, and she no want to be.”

Trottie meant to say "sorry," but could not easily express herself.

"And me give' ittle pooty too," cried the child triumphantly, "and Nor go tell her."

But Nor had a dread of Lina's temper, and would not stir.

"Missy Wharton go."

"No, my dear child," said that lady. "Lina is very wrong to indulge in such wicked ungovernable temper, and until she can see how badly she has behaved, and is thoroughly repentant for her conduct, I beg she may be left to the solitude of her room."

But Trottie, who did not understand one-half Miss Wharton said, yet seemed in her baby mind to know her sister had done wrong, whispered softly to her auntie:

"But oo go and see poor Lina, she only 'ittle girl;" here she shook her head gravely. "Gip and Nor and Pooty and nurse go, and me go, and Lina cry, cry, and never do so no more," and she glanced up wistfully at the pale sweet face bent over her.

"We will do all we can to help her," was the answer, in so sad and low a tone it reached only Gip's ears. "But oh! my darling, in ourselves we can do nothing; only let us pray to God to turn her heart, and make her gentle, tender, and loving. We must not say one harsh word to her,

or forget the precept of our Master, 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another.'"

And how had it fared with Lina? The door closing upon her had left her more hardened and defiant.

She did not regret her tea, but she keenly felt being sent from the room and the manner in which Miss Wharton had spoken to her. And Norman had broken his promise and preferred her little sister to her. Why should he treat her so unjustly and give Trottie the rabbit? It had been promised first to her. What could she do to prevent her little sister having it, and claiming what rightly belonged to her?

Quick as thought it flashed upon her, Why not get the rabbit and hide it where neither Norman nor Trottie would think of looking? With Lina to think was to act. Glancing hurriedly around she saw the coast was clear—nurse upstairs, the servants down-stairs, and those in the dining-room too happy to care for her.

Why not go to the barn and secure the pretty creature? It was twilight; the sun had set, but there was light enough to see her way, and fortunately the outer door was ajar. In a moment she had softly opened it and was hurrying across the lawn, regardless of the wet grass or the dew that was falling heavily.

Only once her heart misgave her and her purpose failed. It was when passing under the open window of the dining-room and hearing her name mentioned. Gip was pleading earnestly and lovingly to Miss Wharton for her.

"Lina did not intend to lose her temper or be rude or disobedient. Only forgive her; do, please, Miss Wharton."

And Aunt Elsie's soft, gentle voice was also raised in her defence and in asking the governess to overlook her fault. The girl's heart softened as she listened, and she might have returned penitent and ashamed of her misconduct, and willing to let her little sister keep the rabbit, had not Trottie, amused by something Norman had said or done, burst out into a loud merry laugh. That decided her, and in another moment, reckless and daring, she was hurrying through the long wet grass to the old barn.

The house, as I mentioned before, was an old-fashioned one. There was an ill-kept lawn in front, with gravel paths, dividing it on the one side from an orchard and kitchen garden, and on the other from a picturesque paddock, broken by clumps of pollards and beech-trees and green meadows sweeping far away. At the back were some unused cow-sheds and a dilapidated barn, with moss-grown and yellow lichen roof.

Its door was locked, but Lina had played too

often in it with Norman and her sisters not to know how to get in; and she soon squeezed herself through a small hole where the boards had been broken away.

By the dim light she could see at the further end the rabbit-hutch hanging on a rusty nail, where Norman had placed it for safety. To pile one upon another a few old bricks, take down the hutch, open it, and seize on the trembling captive, was but the work of a moment.

What a pretty creature it was! and how tame, poking its little pink nose into her hand as if asking for dandelions; how soft and white its coat, how lovely and bright its dark eyes, and what a dear little fluffy tail! What a sweet little pet it would make!

But where could she keep it? There was an empty garret at the top of the house; she might take it there and feed it. But that would not do; Norman had turned it into a workshop, and had a lathe and his carpenters' tools there. She could not keep it in her bed-room or the school-room.

Why not let it go? and then Trottie could not have it; and as the wicked thought rushed upon her she dropped the rabbit, saw it sit up on end for a moment, and then scud away and disappear under a hedge of shining holly.

"Hi! good dog! Sh-h-, there he goes!" and

Tom Bates, the gardener's son, the laziest, most worthless young scamp in the village, made his appearance with his dog, an ill-favoured mongrel cur, at his heels. "Sh-h-, there! catch him, quick, Grip! shake it."

"Stop, Tom!" cried Lina aghast, as the dog tore past her. "It's Master Norman's rabbit!"

But her appeal was too late. There was a squeak, and the pretty creature lay dead at her feet.

"Oh! Tom, Tom! how could you be so cruel?" was all she could say.

"Beest it a bunny?" said the boy with a grin. "Lor', miss, I thowt as 'ow it wor a cat or some varmin. I seed yer adrop it, and so I set Grip at it."

Lina's cheeks flushed, and an angry light came into her eyes.

"And if I did drop it, was that for you to kill it?"

"Lor', miss, but wot were yer doin' in the barn this time o' night? The rabbit warn't yourn, if it wor Master Norman's; and I heerd him a-telling tother young chap Master Maynid it wor fur Miss Trottie, but he was afeared yer wouldn't let her 'ave it without he got one for yer to 'ave too."

"I don't care," began Lina, her face ablaze with passion. "What business was it of yours?"

"No bizziness," answered the boy with a laugh,

and in an impudent tone; "but I'll tell yer wot I'll do—chuck it over the wall and say nowt to nobody, if that will oblige yer."

Poor Lina, into what trouble had her temper brought her! To be the cause of the poor little rabbit's death—to have this horrid, impertinent boy, known as "the terror of the village," laughing at her, and offering, as it were, to enter into an agreement with her to keep the matter a secret. No, no! she could not endure it; better five thousand times to tell Norman the truth.

"Well, miss, I b'ain't agoin' to stand 'ere all night. Give me sixpence and I'll hold my tongue, and nobody 'ud know nothink. Wot! yer won't, won't yer?" as Lina endeavoured to pass him. "Ye'd better, miss."

But the boy's insolence and attempt to exact a bribe restored her natural courage.

"I'll not give you one penny, Tom Bates," she answered firmly, "and I'll tell auntie about the rabbit and your conduct."

"No, yer sha'n't," was the rude reply, "and 'ave her givin' father the sack, and he givin' me a thrashin'. I knows wot his hidings are. 'Ere, come back, Miss Leena."

But with a bound she had passed him, and quick as lightning hurried up the path leading to the house, leaving him and the rabbit behind her. It did not take long to gain her







room, and sink breathless and exhausted by the side of her bed, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

Bitterly she repented giving way to such spite and cruel jealousy. Oh! if she could but have controlled her temper and not have answered Miss Wharton, none of this would have happened, and the poor little bunny would have been alive, and she spared all this trouble she had brought upon herself. Yet, after all, when she came to think the matter over, was not Norman to blame for it all? He had treated her most unjustly and laughed at her; and when he saw how vexed she was, why could he not have given her the rabbit, and not aggravated her so. And as to Miss Wharton, why did her papa and mama go away and leave her to such a horrid disagreeable old thing. They knew she could never get on with her. Miss Wharton only cared for Gip, and giving Norman an hour or two of an evening in helping him with his lessons for Mr. Grant. She never scolded *him*, or found fault with *his* lessons when they were not properly learnt. Oh! she hated such partiality; and here Lina worked herself up into thinking what had happened was owing to the faults of others, not of her own, when the door opened and Miss Wharton appeared.

"I am glad to see, Lina," she said, noticing the

girl's red eyes and tearful face, "you are sorry for your conduct."

Poor Miss Wharton, she meant it for the best; but she had not hit on the right method of managing Lina.

To be found crying was bad enough, but to be thought "sorry" for what was not her fault was worse; so looking steadily at Miss Wharton with knitted brows and a sullen frown, she answered curtly:

"I don't know what I have to be sorry about."

"Lina," was the reply, "I came here hoping to find you penitent and sorry for your misconduct. I find you insolent, and I fear incorrigible. It is useless my trying to reason with you while you are in your present mood; but I desire you remain in your room learning the impositions I give you."

"Which I will not do!" said Lina, with white face and set lips.

"I shall not argue the point with you. You will do as I tell you. Be assured I shall be obeyed," and Miss Wharton swept from the room, revolving in her own mind what means could she use to conquer this stubborn, unlovable child.

But it was not for her to break the fallow ground and bring water out of the stony rock.

Hardly had Lina time to think over her visit, and determine to become more rebellious, than

loving arms were around her, and Gip's tearful eyes were bent upon her.

"Oh! Lina, Lina, darling! I am so sorry. Oh! dear, why did you vex Miss Wharton? Do tell her you are sorry. See here, I slipped this piece of cake in my pocket, and auntie says you are to have some milk."

But Lina pushed her from her. "I don't want any milk or your cake. Go away; I will not have you here. Nasty spying thing! You have only come to see what I'm doing, and then to tell Norman or Trottie."

"Lina, Lina! indeed I have not; only listen to me."

But Lina was deaf to all Gip's pleadings, and as she, weeping, passed out of the door, Aunt Elsie silently entered.

She did not heed her anger, her flushed and swollen face. She only laid her hand upon her, and drawing her gently to her, said, in her soft voice:

"My poor child!" Then taking her in her arms she kissed her tear-stained cheek. "My child," she continued, "I want to say a few words to you. I cannot tell you how unhappy I am, and have come to ask you, dear, to try and control your temper. For my sake try. Think, Lina, how heavy is the charge, how great the responsibility, your dear father and mother have placed

in me. Think, dear, how tenderly they love you, how deeply they feel this separation, and how anxious they will be for my letters telling them all about you. Lina, my child! do you want to increase their sorrow, to make their hearts ache the more?"

Ah! Aunt Elsie, you have touched the right chord, and all that is good and true in the child's nature responds. She did not care for what Miss Wharton said. The cold, measured tones of her displeasure did not affect her in the least.

Her heart was hardened against Gip's loving caresses and tender pleading, but the sight of her aunt's sad face, and the knowledge of the unhappiness she was causing her and her parents, placed her conduct in a proper light, and made her feel the misery her wilful evil temper was bringing to those dear ones whose love and good opinion she valued most.

With a low cry and burst of passionate weeping she flung her arms round Aunt Elsie's neck, and in broken words sobbed out:

"Oh, auntie, you cannot tell how wicked I've been. Oh, so wicked! so much worse than you could imagine!"

And then slowly, with her face hidden in her hands, she told of her visit to the barn, and the fate of the unfortunate little bunny.

But Mrs. Howard did not draw herself up, or

turn away shocked and indignant. She only stooped and kissed again, very tenderly, the tear-stained face.

"My darling," she softly whispered, as she saw how frankly Lina owned her fault, and how completely melted and sorrowful was the proud little heart, that had hitherto appeared so impenetrable and hardened,

"I know how naughty I have been, how awfully wicked," sobbed Lina. "Oh, auntie, do you think God will ever forgive me?"

"Yes, my child, if you ask Him, for He alone can give you strength to subdue your temper, and make you more than conqueror."

Long and earnestly did Mrs. Howard talk, in gentle persuasive tones, until Lina, thoroughly penitent, had written a letter of apology to Miss Wharton asking her forgiveness; and another, blotted with tears, to Norman, telling him of the rabbit's death and her share in it.

Then Aunt Elsie, seeing how pale and wearied she looked, assisted her to undress and go to bed.

"But, my dear child," she suddenly exclaimed, "your shoes are so damp, why did you not tell me you had been on the wet grass? I hope you have not taken cold. Will you have a cup of warm tea?"

But Lina was too tired to care for anything. She only buried her face in the pillow, and was

asleep before she could return her aunt's parting kiss or say good-night.

For a long time Mrs. Howard watched by the little sleeper, until a more peaceful happier expression came to the white, sad little face, then she stole softly down the stairs to talk the matter over with Miss Wharton, and make Lina's peace with her and Norman; so that forgiven, sorrowful, and repentant, she might hear nothing more on the subject of her misconduct.

But Aunt Elsie little knew that, with all her loving endeavours to control Lina's temper, it was to bring on her a greater sorrow; and many bitter tears were to be shed before the child could subdue her petulance or control her unhappy disposition.





## CHAPTER VII.

### UNCLE HUGH COMES AND NORMAN HAS A PRESENT.



LINA passed a restless night, and awoke in the morning with a slight cold and bad headache.

Aunt Elsie, who had been to see her several times during the night, insisted on her having some tea and dry toast before getting up, and then made her remain quietly in the nursery by the warm fire, where she was out of all draughts from open doors or windows.

Lina was only too glad to stay there, as she did not care to meet Miss Wharton, nor did she feel well enough for lessons.

The nursery was one of the brightest and cosiest rooms in the house, and the children were much attached to it. And when nurse gave a tea-party, and invited "Master Norman and the two young ladies," they were but too pleased to accept the invitation, and spend a merry evening with her and Trottie.



"Oh, Lina," cried Norman, bursting into the room, "I am so awfully glad you are able to be up. Auntie is fidgeting so about you, and afraid you were in for a cold or something. But you look all right," and he bent over her and kissed her affectionately.

Her eyes filled with tears and her lips quivered.

"Oh! Norman," she exclaimed, "are you really glad to see me? I have been such a spiteful horrid thing."

"There, shut up, do. Don't talk of anything that bothers you."

"But can you forgive me?" and she stole her hand into his.

Norman stared at her with such a comical look of amazement on his bright handsome face, Lina could not refrain a faint smile.

"Well, I declare! What next? I'm sorry for the poor little beggar of a rabbit; but you're a regular brick, Lina, to be so plucky to have written such an awfully nice letter about it. I wouldn't have done it."

"Oh, yes, you would had you behaved as I did," said Lina in a low voice.

"I'm not so sure," was the reply; "but let's drop the subject. Here's Gip and Trottie, and nurse, as usual, in a state of conflusteration, which, you know, means botheration."

"Well, Trottie, come here, little one."

But the child ran past him and clambered up on Lina's lap.

"Oo sick, 'ittle girl, poor Lina," and she patted her sister's forehead with her fat little dimpled hand.

"Oo head ache?"

"Yes, darling," and Lina clasped the child in her arms and kissed the sweet baby face.

"Me not make any noise, me no play—no, no! Nor not play, or Gip, or nurse, or dolly."

"Oh! Lina darling, how nice it is to see you here again!" and Gip gazed lovingly at her.

Poor Lina! how keenly she felt the kindness, the affection shown her; and bitterly she repented grieving those who loved her so dearly. If she could but recall the past how differently she would have acted; but she was yet to learn that we can never undo the evil of our lives, however much we may try, and can only avoid such errors in the future.

"Lina want pretty 'ittle tings to 'mooze' her."

Trottie meant "amuse," but she could not speak plainly, even for four years old.

"Go, Trottie, and get her something very nice," said Gip.

The child needed no second bidding; in a moment she had toddled to her toy-box, and soon returned dragging a Noah's Ark almost the size

of herself; then, with Nor's assistance, she deposited its contents in Lina's lap, assuring her the "bow-wow," which, by the by, was represented by the elephant, "wouldn't bite;" then she was off again, and finally, after many journeys backwards and forwards, Lina had piled up, not only the animals before the flood, but a large dancing bear—the machinery broken, of course—which could neither dance nor stand upright, and toys of all sizes and descriptions, besides nearly all the furniture out of a doll's house that had been given to Gip.

"My head is quite well now," said Lina with a happy laugh. "Trottie, darling, your pretty presents have cured it." But Trottie's only reply was to shake her little head, and set off in search of something else.

There was "Pooty," and she speedily appeared with that long-suffering animal, who set up a dismal yell as she found herself flung ignominiously on the heap of broken sharp-edged toys.

"And there's Dolly," hinted Gip.

"Me get her," cried Trottie delighted, and the next moment Lina found herself compelled to hush to rest one of the most forlorn dilapidated specimens, with one lock of tangled tow on her head—that Trottie carefully brushed, combed, and tied up every night—eyeless, one-armed, one-legged, and leaving a trail of sawdust wherever

it went, a creature hideous to behold, but its little mistress' especial treasure.

"Dolly sick," said Trottie, ruefully regarding it. "She take nasty powder."

"Yes," said nurse entering. "Get her into bed, and give her some sugar. There, go at once—see how pale she is."

For an instant the child seemed incredulous; but on nurse showing her another big spot on her face, which was indeed nothing but lumps and bumps of chipped or melted wax, she became too anxious to hug her tightly and occupy herself in making a lovely bed with the tablecloth.

"I don't want to say anything before her," said nurse, dropping her voice into a mysterious whisper, "but your aunt has heard from your Uncle Hugh, and he's coming to-day, and you're all to go in the wagonette to Willow Farm. He wants to see Mrs. Meadows perticularly."

"Oh! nurse," burst from three pairs of lips, "coming to-day?"

"Yes, my dears. You, sir, and Miss Gip is to go along with him, and Miss Lina if she's well enough."

Lina flushed scarlet. It was not her health, it was that nasty, horrid Miss Wharton would not let her go.

But a glance from Norman, who seemed to

read her thoughts, checked her, and leaning back on her chair tears gathered in her eyes.

"You shall go," whispered a kind voice in her ear, and he smilingly stood beside her. "Cheer up, old girl, it's all right."

"But oh! suppose—"

"Don't suppose nothing, miss," interposed nurse. "You'll go with your uncle fast enough, only don't show off any of your tantrums."

"No, nurse," said Lina humbly. "I will try never, never again to get into a temper."

"You've got, Miss Lina, and all of you, the best, the sweetest of aunts, more like an angel than a creature of mortal mould, and with your pa and ma over the sea, miles and miles away, and that dear woman with her sorrow pressing heavy on her tender heart, to go and give her trouble, should make you ashamed of yourselves."

"Oh, nurse," cried Gip, "I know darling auntie is a widow, and has had a great sorrow, tell us what it is."

But nurse pursed up her lips, shook her head, and was turning away, until Norman caught her by the arm, swung her round, and said in his most coaxing tones,

"Come, nurse dear, tell us. We are not babies or idiots to speak of it again and pain Aunt Elsie. Tell us, there's an old duck."

I think if nurse had a favourite it was her boy,

Master Norman, and if she had a weak point, it was faith in his somewhat equivocal compliments, and being flattered by them.

"An old duck! Well, Master Norman, what else? And there's that dear child to be got ready to go out."

"Oh! Trottie's very busy and happy, don't bother about her."

"Well, if you ses nothing of what I tell you, I'll just say this."

"There, Trottie, go put dolly to bed, and get pussy to lie beside her." This was to Trottie, who made her appearance with the doll in her arms, wrapped up in the table-cloth, which was trailing a yard or more behind her.

"It's just this," continued nurse. "I lived with your dear ma and auntie long before either married—sweet young ladies they were, good and beautiful. Your ma married Captain North, now the colonel your pa, and Miss Elsie married Captain Howard, and went to the Injies with him. There she lived until her little baby was a year old, and then it grew sickly like, and the doctor said it must go to England to save its life; and Captain Howard was too ill at the time for her to leave him, and she sent the dear darling little baby home with a nurse. But the ship was lost, and the child and every one on board; and then Captain Howard died, and your dear aunt came

to your ma and set herself to taking care of you. But she doesn't forget her little one, and when she thinks of the sea and its cruel waves she remembers who is lying in its depths, and of the sorrow that's come to her. And that's what makes her sad and quiet-like, and so fond of children, she can't a-bear to say a hard word to them. But don't say what I ses unless she speaks of her trouble to you, then you may tell her I told you all about it."

"Dear, dear auntie," said Lina; "how little we guessed her sorrow!"

"How long is it ago?" asked Norman.

"I can't well tell," replied Nurse Weston, "but I should think if her baby had lived it would have been as old as Miss Lina."

"Ten years old?" said Gip.

"About that. But your dear auntie had a fever when she came to your ma, and for a long time knew nothing about her trouble, so when she got well again if she didn't speak of it we were not to do so, and that's how you never heard much about it. Ah! here she comes;" and as Mrs. Howard with her pale sweet face entered the room there was no one there except Trottie who had not heard of the little unknown cousin, and they all felt more gently inclined and more loving towards the bereaved mother.

"My dears," she said, "I have heard this morn-

ing from your Uncle Hugh. He is coming to-day, and wants to take you all to Mrs. Meadows, at Willow Farm. Of course the day must be a holiday, which, Norman dear, you must make up with Mr. Grant by extra work."

Norman made a wry face, and gave a comical twist to his mouth. "I'm awfully glad to see Uncle Hugh, he's an awfully jolly old chap, and I like him all the better when he tips me well."

"Oh! Norman," cried Lina, "you horrid boy, to think of what he gives you."

"But it is not that, auntie," and Norman flung himself back in his chair, and taking out his pocket handkerchief began to fan himself with it. "I've worked so jolly hard I think a rest would do me good; don't you think so?"

"You idle thing!" said Gip, "you're always taking a holiday."

"Well, I'll work, never fear; but even Miss Wharton says I am outgrowing my strength."

"The weeds grow apace," said Lina mischievously.

"She compared me to a drooping lily—"

"What nonsense, sir!" chimed in nurse indignantly, as she looked at the boy's round healthy face; "she meant a cabbage-rose. But please, ma'am, is Miss Trottie to go?"

"I think, nurse," replied Mrs. Howard, "the drive would do the dear child good. They will



all go as far as Shirley Wood in the wagonette, and I thought that a ramble through that pretty wood to gather violets and primroses would be very pleasant."

"Oh! auntie," said Gip, "how lovely it will be!"

"Me take pooty," said Trottie decidedly. "She sick and white; oh, so ill!"

"Don't take her," whispered Norman, "take all your dollies" (Norman knew there were about a dozen, and to collect them would be a good morning's work for the child), "and your Noah's ark, and those poor dear cows in your Swiss farm—Lina can carry them in her lap."

"Me get them!" cried Trottie delighted, "and then me go wif oo, and Gip, and Lina. Oo go?" and she looked up with loving eyes at her sister.

"Yes, darling," said her aunt, "of course Lina will go; and you will take care of her, she has such a headache."

"Auntie," said Lina softly, "may I stay with you, if you remain at home?"

For a moment Mrs. Howard looked too surprised to speak. She knew an afternoon in Shirley Wood, or a visit to Mrs. Meadows', Lina would have regarded as the greatest treat she could have, and now not to care about going. And she looked so much better, and the day was so lovely; what could be her motive for remaining behind?

The truth was, Lina, humbled and penitent, was touched to the heart at nurse's story and the fate of her little cousin, Aunt Elsie's little baby child. What sorrow had been hers, borne in silence and unobtrusive grief! And how loving and gentle she had always been! Her very loss might have soured her disposition, or made her irritable and peevish, but Lina could not recall one harsh word, one unkind action. Always meek and sweet-tempered, she had borne patiently her childish outbursts of temper and her too frequent fits of ill-humour. And how ashamed she felt of the exhibition of last night, of her cruelty to the pretty white rabbit, and the sorrow she must have caused her auntie! so now, if she could but stay and spend a happy hour with her, and if she were busied to be able to help her, how gladly she would do it.

"Oh! auntie, dear, do let me stay with you. I know you will not care to go, and I would rather, so much rather, stay with you at home," she pleaded.

"Of course, my dear child, you shall remain with me if you wish. Gip, Norman, Trottie, and nurse can accompany your uncle. Why! is not that a fly stopped? Yes, I am sure it is, and I can hear your uncle's voice. Come, children, come and welcome him."

And with the merry troop at her heels Aunt

Elsie hurried down the stairs, just in time to see a tumble-down shabby cab (the best, however, in the village), with the boniest, most wretched of horses, draw up at the door, and a white-haired old gentleman with sharp gray eyes and a pleasant face endeavouring to extricate himself from a pile of packages and brown-paper parcels which were rolling about, and dropping down in every direction as he tried to alight.

"Bless me, my dear!" he exclaimed, as catching up one parcel and hastily pushing another from under his feet, she caught him by the hand and landed him safely in the hall. "Bless me, Elsie, do you call that thing a cab? why, it's shaken my life out of me. It is a scandalous thing, a swindle, a deliberate attempt at extortion, to inveigle any one into such a conveyance."

"Oh, uncle, I am so sorry. You did not mention at what time we might expect you, or I would have sent the pony-carriage to meet you."

"There, never mind, my dear, it's not your fault. Now, cabman, what's your fare?"

"Eighteenpence, sir, from the station."

"Eighteen fiddle-strings! Why, I never heard of such a monstrous charge."

"It's better than two mile, and I drove you quick, as you arst me, sir," said the driver civilly.

But Uncle Hugh was not going to pay the

man until he had "another growl," as Norman called it, and then giving him the money and bidding the parcels be brought into the dining-room, he took Trottie up in his arms and followed Mrs. Howard.

"Why, bless me, how these children grow! It's not right, Elsie; they are running up too quickly, and outgrowing their strength."

"Oh! uncle," began Norman, "don't bother auntie. You will make her so nervous. We are strong enough; nothing the matter with us. Look at Trottie, is she not a picture of a healthy child?" and taking the darling from his uncle's rather awkward embrace he stood her before him, pointing with delight to her rosy cheeks and dimpled face.

"Dear, dear! yes, yes! she looks very well, and so do all of you. There, come and find each of you a parcel with your name on it that I've brought for you from London."

There was a chorus of thanks as they set busily at turning over the packages to find the one addressed to each.

There was an ink-stand and blotter for Aunt Elsie, a work-box lined with blue satin and beautifully fitted up for Gip, a very handsome desk for Lina, a book for Norman, and a doll, gorgeously arrayed, who shut its eyes on being laid down, and said "Mamma, papa," in rather

squeaky tones, on its waist being pinched, for Trottie.

"Oh! me love oo," said that little darling as she hugged tightly her pretty gift. "Oo velly velly good 'ittle girl; but me tink me comb oo hair. Oo want it tied a blue ribbon? Me do it," and seizing a piece of twine from Norman's parcel she twisted it around "dolly's" head until one-half her long fair tresses came away in Trottie's plump little hand.

"I hope, my boy, you will like the book I have brought you," said Uncle Hugh to Norman. "I read it as a boy, and that must be many years ago, considering I am your mother's and Aunt Elsie's uncle and your great-uncle."

"Oh! I am sure I shall like it," and Norman unfolding the paper caught a glimpse of a sober brown cover. "But is it an old-fashioned story?"

"Old-fashioned, sir! Bless me," replied Uncle Hugh wrathfully. "No, sir; *Stirring Adventures and Hairbreadth Escapes by Sea and Land* will never be old-fashioned. Why, you might just as well call Shakspeare old-fashioned. The adventures are most exciting, most stirring. Eh!"

"Here's one," cried Norman with a merry laugh, and his blue eyes twinkling with mischief; "just listen; it's awfully stirring.

"Buttons must be rubbed with a bit of flannel

and salt; and from the larger take out the *red* inside.'

"I say, uncle, that sounds a mysterious and hairbreadth escape enough."

"Dear me! What! what are you reading? I don't remember that part. Eh!"

"Hush! all of you," continued Norman, "isn't this awfully too awful?"

"When *they* are *black* (that means Niggers of course) they will not do, being too old.' Oh! uncle, fancy! Old Niggers cannot be eaten—too tough and bony, I suppose. 'Throw a little salt over and put them into a stew-pan with some mace and pepper.'"

"Norman, my dear boy, what are you reading?" and Aunt Elsie bent over his shoulder.

But he closed the book, adding in a sepulchral voice:

"'They will keep two years,'—fancy what a horrible idea!—'and are delicious.'"

"Why, you silly boy," cried Lina, snatching the book from his hand; "why, it's a cookery book, and he is reading the recipe 'How to pickle mushrooms.' Oh, Norman, how stupid you are!"

"Dear me! dear me!" exclaimed Uncle Hugh. "You don't mean to say so! It's my mistake, I directed the books wrong. I intended that cookery book for your Mary. She put too much salt into the soup the last time I was here.

Bless me, how very foolish! Ah! this is your book, my boy. Yes, that's the 'stirring adventures and wonderful escapes' I wanted you to read,—and I wrote 'For Cook' on it! How very stupid of me!"





## CHAPTER VIII.

### MR. BARKER'S TEA-PARTY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

**I**T was the day of Mr. Barker's tea-party; and anxiously had Nellie and little Birdie looked forward to it; for six weeks had elapsed since his promise, and it was now nearly the end of April.

Its postponement was chiefly owing to the old soldier having taken a violent cold which kept him indoors, and not fit, as he said, "to receive visitors;" and then the wound in his leg became troublesome, and caused him, much to his annoyance, to become, for some little time, the inmate of a hospital.

The weeks as they sped on had brought little change to his lodgers.

Nellie had worked as usual early and late to add her share to the support of old Meg and little Birdie, and neither the cold biting winds of March or fitful sunshine and showers of April had kept her from her usual place in the Strand. She had daily watched for the kind donor of the



half-crown, and always reserved a pretty bunch of her best flowers for him.

Sometimes in passing he would stop for a moment to ask how that little "What-do-you-call-her" was getting on, and Nellie was too glad to be able to say, "Little Birdie, sir, is quite well," and with a grateful smile and many thanks accept the shilling or sometimes the half-crown slipped into her hand; but latterly tears would gather in her eyes and a big lump come in her throat, and she would turn away her head when her kind old friend approached for fear of giving way to a passionate burst of weeping; for somehow, with a conviction she could not divest herself of, she felt little Birdie was passing slowly but surely from the toils and the privations of Golden Square, and from old Meg's loving tenderness, to the bright, the glorious home so far away; to the home where she would never more know pain or suffering, tears or sorrow, but would be ever with the Saviour she so truly loved, and the mother for whom her childish heart unceasingly mourned.

It was not that little Birdie appeared to suffer or to complain of any particular ailment, it was simply an increasing weakness, a gradual wasting away. Old Meg had sent for the doctor, and he had seen the child several times and had recommended her removal to the hospital; and when she cried

and fretted at the thoughts of being separated from Nellie and her faithful old friend, he suggested that country air and plenty of nourishing food *might* be of benefit, and then returning to old Meg the money she was trying to force on his acceptance, gravely shook his head and passed slowly down the stairs.

But with the mild spring weather Mickey O'Brien had wonderfully improved in health and strength, and for the last week, to give the little fellow a change, Nellie had wheeled him in a perambulator to the Strand, and let him stay beside her, helping her to arrange and sort her flowers, until Mrs. O'Brien would manage to leave her business for an hour and come to take him home. It would be impossible to describe Mickey's delight at being of service to Nellie, and his enjoyment of the change, from the monotony of Paradise Row to the bustle and noisy life of the Strand. He was never tired of the sight of the shops, and the passers-by, or of the occasional glimpses of the river. He soon learned to know Nellie's best customers, and there were none for whose coming he would more eagerly watch than for that of the kind old gentleman, who would usually, in purchasing a flower from Nellie, stop as he passed on to say a kind word to him.

"Nellie," said Mickey one day to her, "I have found out that gentleman's name."

"How did you, Mickey dear?" was the reply.

"I listened," said the boy. "My ears are as sharp as my eyes, and I heard a gentleman say, 'Well, Rivers, and how are you?'" and with an emphatic nod of his head, "You'll see I am right, he is Mr. Rivers."

"What a pretty name! don't forget it, Mickey."

"All right," was the reply; "you see if I don't remember it."

And Mickey did not forget it.

And now the day had come, and Mr. Barker's tea-party was to take place. There had been so much to do in scrubbing, dusting, sweeping, polishing, and arranging, that Nellie had given herself "a holiday," as she called it, and from her early dinner to the five o'clock now striking by Mr. Barker's cuckoo-clock had not had one spare moment.

And now, with her best frock on, she was brushing Birdie's hair, and twisting around her finger its soft lovely curls. The child, patient and gentle, with a look of great weariness on her sweet face, was lying back on the pillow, too tired apparently to take notice of the elaborate display Nellie was making of it.

Suddenly, catching a glimpse of Nellie's face, she started up and flung her arms around her.

"Nell, you are crying; what is the matter?"

I don't know;" and Nellie bravely forced back the glistening tears that started to her eyes, and with a loving smile bent over the little wasted form.

"You are not crying for me," said Birdie, "because I am not as strong as I was? I did want, Nell," and she looked up wistfully into her face, "to be able to help you to-day—it would be so nice to run up and down stairs and to go with Mr. Barker and buy all the beautiful things we are going to have, and to fetch the cups and saucers for you, and put some flowers on the table, but I think I grow tireder, tireder every day," and with a little sigh she lay back on the pillow.

Nellie could not speak, her heart seemed too full for utterance. How she and little Birdie had longed for this party, had talked and thought of it! and now—ah! it seemed too sad, too heavy a load for her to bear.

Suddenly Birdie sat up, and with a bright smile said, "Nellie, I'm going to ask Meg to do something for me—oh, something so nice! I hope she will not say no when I ask her," and the child's face clouded.

"What is it, darling?" and old Meg, entering the room, stood beside her.

"Doesn't Nell look pretty?" said the child.

"Yes, dear," and the old woman looked lovingly at her.

"See what pretty hair she has, and such a pretty face! She looks like a lady in her Sunday frock, doesn't she?"

"Yes," answered Meg, "Nell looks very nice."

"But she would look ever so much prettier if she had one thing more."

"What is it?"

"Her necklace. Oh, Meg, do let her wear it just this once to please me," and Birdie glanced appealingly at her.

For a moment Meg hesitated, then seeing how earnestly the child wished it she crossed the room, and opening a drawer in the old-fashioned set opposite, unlocked a small box there was in it, and taking out a necklet of rich silver filigree and evidently foreign workmanship, clasped it round Nellie's throat.

"Oh, Nell, how beautiful it is! Oh, my! how nice! you look just like a real lady," and Birdie clapped her hands approvingly.

"Is it real solid silver?" asked Nellie.

"Yes, my dear," answered Meg, "and a very handsome one too."

"I wonder why mother did not give it to Birdie," said Nellie thoughtfully, "and why she would never let me wear it until, as she said, 'I was old enough to take care of it.'"

"There, dear heart!" cried old Meg, "don't you worry about why she wished you to have it; just

hurry down-stairs, for I hear Mr. Barker calling for you."

"Is the company come?" whispered Birdie in an awestruck voice.

"No, dearie," answered Meg; "you and Nell are to go down first to arrange the table, and then Mrs. O'Brien and Mrs. Field will arrive, and you and Nell will receive us—we're the company," and she laughed merrily at the idea.

But Birdie seemed still listless and disinclined to move, until Mr. Barker's voice was heard followed by Mr. Barker himself putting his head in at the door.

"Come, come," he said; "here's the tea-party ready, and you not there to receive the guests. Come, you lazy little one, quick march! Right, shoulders forward!" but seeing how wearied the child looked he caught her up in his arms—ah! how light and frail a little burden it was—and carried her down the stairs.

And now there was the table-cloth to be laid, and all the good things to decorate it. A boiled ham with a real frill of coloured paper, a dish of shrimps—oh, such beauties! a big cake in the centre of the table, and jam and marmalade, and home-made bread, and delicious butter, and even Birdie's water-cress was not forgotten.

And just as with a great clatter and much running to and fro Nellie had arranged all the

cups and saucers on the tea-tray, and Mr. Barker had made the tea and put the tea-pot on the hob to draw, and began to cut some slices of bread and butter, Mrs. Field, with her two little children, Winnie and Minnie, arrived. She, looking very hot and flustered, afraid, poor woman, her Sunday dress might look a bit shabby, and the little ones, shy and silent, clinging to her skirts.

But with a quiet grace that surprised even the old soldier, Nellie came forward to receive them, and soon put her kind friend at ease, and had the children in a few minutes laughing and talking as merrily as if they were at home; indeed, in the days that were to come Mrs. Field never reverted to that eventful evening without remarking, "the queen herself with her satin gown and gold crown on could not have been more the real lady."

Mrs. O'Brien and Mickey were the next to arrive, and then Mrs. Maybrick made her appearance, and soon all were gathered round the hospitable table, Mickey in the greatest good temper and delight, his attention being divided between Nellie, how pretty she looked, and how nicely she poured out the tea, and what lots of sugar she put in each cup, and Mr. Barker, what a splendid hero he was, with real medals (for Mr. Barker had put them on to do honour to the occasion)—ah, well, when he grew up he would be a soldier and fight for his country.

And now what a happy meal it was—even Birdie seemed brighter and stronger, and sat close to Nellie, laughing and chatting blithely—and how quickly the big loaf disappeared; the beauty of the ham became a thing of the past; as to the shrimps, only their heads and tails remained to tell of their existence; the cake was cut, and what huge slices Mr. Barker and Nellie handed round; and as to the jam and marmalade—well, empty pots and a certain amount of stickiness told their own tale.

What a pleasant evening it was, and how thoroughly every one seemed to enjoy it; and how Nellie's necklace was admired, the beauty of its design and exquisite workmanship praised, and many were the questions asked about it which Nellie could not answer and old Meg turned a deaf ear to.

"Shure, lave it alone," said Mrs. O'Brien, "there's a family histhory to it may be, wasn't there? My cousin's great aunt, Biddy O'Flannigan, as dacent a woman as ever lived, with a rale silver tay-pot, as big as life and a dale bigger, and that cost a power o' money, I disremember now how much, but wasn't she to lave it to her. Arrah! hush, now, shure it's a knock at the door, and some one is spakin'. Shure I hope it's not for me—"

"No, no, Mrs. O'Brien," cried Nellie, "stay



where you are; I will go. It is some one at the outer door."

"An' you'll be comin' back wid ye?"

"Yes," was Nellie's answer as she gently released herself from Birdie's embrace, and putting down the child with a happy smile and nod to Mickey (who, leaning back in Mr. Barker's big easy-chair, was listening eagerly to the old soldier's campaigning recollections, which he was relating to Mrs. Maybrick) was passing out of the room, when Big Ben asked where she was going.

"There's a knock at the street door, and I am going to answer it," said Nellie as her glance rested affectionately on the happy group before her, and then lingered lovingly on little Birdie.

"Here, lassie, stay a bit; I'll go. Fancy, Mick, my boy, gentlemen sitting still and ladies allowed to answer the door. That's not the manners of the army, is it?"

"No," returned the boy gravely, "gentlemen should wait on ladies. I will when I'm a big man and a soldier like you, and wear those," and he pointed to Big Ben's medals.

"Bravo, little man! Very fine sentiments, my lad, and may you ever stick to them. Try and get strong and well and grow up a fine young fellow, and then list and serve your queen and old England, and fight their battles."

"Go on," cried Mickey excitedly, "tell us more."

"Well, then, you'll go abroad and see foreign countries; but never forget your mother. Keep to her, my lad, never forsake her."

"No, I ain't agoing to that," said the boy; "I love her, and Nellie—"

"That's right. Be true to your God, to your sovereign, your mother, and your comrade; you'll come to no harm then. But where's the little lassie?"

"She went out while you were talking to Mickey," said Little Birdie. "But, oh my! what's that?"

"Oh! Mr. Barker, what is the matthur?" exclaimed Mrs. O'Brien, as a faint cry from outside reached them, followed by a thud, as if some one had fallen, and then an ominous silence.

To rush from the room almost before the others had started to their feet, fling open the door, and gain the street was to the excited little widow but the work of a moment.

"Oh! merciful goodness," she cried, as, stricken dumb with horror, they gathered around, "what has happened?"

For there, on the pavement before them, lay Nellie, her eyes closed, her sweet face still and pale as death, and her beautiful hair falling like

a veil around her, and half concealing a cruel gash on her cheek, from whence a thin stream of blood was trickling.

Stooping over her was Polly Matthews, one hand raised to strike the prostrate figure, the other trying to tear away the necklace that Nellie still held firmly in her grasp.

"Oh! ye murdherin' thief, ye owdacious villin, get along wid ye," and with a vigorous push Mrs. O'Brien flung the girl back, making her at the same time release her hold of the necklace. "Oh, ye stony-hearted wretch! There, seize her, howld her tight."

Then flinging herself beside Nellie she tried tenderly to raise her head and chafe the cold stiffening fingers.

"Oh! spake to me, Nellie acushla. Shure, are ye kilt intirely? Spake to me, darlin'."

But there was neither sound or movement, and through the crowd now gathering around, Big Ben made his way, and with one glance at the cruel blow and white face, caught her up in his arms. "Here, one of you," said he, turning to those assembled near, "go for Dr. Raymond, you know where he lives, and tell him Nellie Gray has met with an accident," and while a big boy hurried off with a dozen more at his heels, Mr. Barker carried the child upstairs, and laid her gently on her little bed.

"There, don't 'ee take on so," said the old man cheerfully, as Meg hurried to the bedside, and with a rag and cold water tried to stanch the wound. "She'll be all right, poor little lassie. Aye, aye, but that Polly Matthews was an out-and-out cowardly un, and—"

Big Ben drew himself up, "But I'll know the meaning on't."

Polly Matthews, held as if in a vice by Mrs. O'Brien, was sobbing violently when Mr. Barker made his appearance.

"Oh, but I didn't mean to do it," she cried "I just heeard you were agoin' to have a party and she never arst me, and I just peeped through the corner of the window blind, and saw you all, and she with her necklace. I thought as how I'd try and get her to come out, and just make her give it to me, and that's all I did, for she fell and hit herself agen' the pavement, and that's all I knows about it." As Doctor Raymond had just then made his appearance, and after examining the wound, said that Nellie was much shaken, and must be kept quiet for a day or two, but was in no danger as she was recovering from her faintness, Mrs. O'Brien, sorely against her will, had to let the offender go, threatening her that should she dare molest Nellie again she would be locked up at the police station; and so, followed by a hooting rabble, and sure of being soundly whipped

by her mother on her return home, Polly Matthews disappears from this history.

Crouched on the floor, her face buried in her hands, with the remains of the longed-for tea-party around her, was Little Birdie. None had thought of her or Mickey in the late excitement, and the poor little fellow had limped towards her, striving in his own way to comfort her.

"But it's wrong to cry," he said in a low voice, "and she wouldn't let you if she know'd it, and you shouldn't do things behind one's back as you wouldn't do afore them;" and then, as if to prove the truth of this assertion, he burst into a fit of weeping.

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie," moaned Birdie, "what shall I do without you?"

"What's that ye're sayin'?" said Mrs. O'Brien cheerily as she entered the room. "Do widout Nellie? An' shure it's meself that was just thinkin' what would she do widout you—for there she is callin' for yer this blessed minnit. Mrs. Field, the good-nathured craythur, will tak' care of Mickey until I come down again. Let me carry ye up, alanna."

"Will Nellie die, mother?" interrupted Mickey eagerly.

"There, just howld yer tongue," she answered, shaking her head at him, and pointing to Birdie to intimate he was to be careful what was said

before her. "Is it dying ye mane? 'Deed, I wonder ye would dar' to talk of such a thing. Come, acushla, bid Mickey good-night and come wid me." And taking the child tenderly up in her arms, she carried her softly up the creaking old stairs, quickly undressed her, and laid her by Nellie's side.

"Dear heart," said Meg, "how kind and neighbourly you are! Now she will sleep, perhaps; for she has done nothing but ask for Little Birdie ever since she came to, and knew me. The doctor says she is to take the draught he has just sent round, and then she will have a good night's rest, and be better in the morning. But she must be kept quiet, and—"

"There, now, ma'am," said Mrs. Field, "don't take on so," as poor old Meg's voice trembled. "Don't worry, like a good soul. I'll just run home and put the children in bed, my husband will look after them, and I'll hurry back and sit up with the dear child. You go home, ma'am. You can't leave little Mickey alone in the house all night; and I've two shillings put by that will help Mrs. Maybrick to get something for Nell in the morning."

But Mrs. O'Brien laid her hand on Mrs. Field's arm, and said in a low voice:

"Keep your airnin's for your little childer. We thank ye kindly for offering them; but I

shall look afther this dear woman and Little Birdie and Nellie, and do all I can to help them. Shure it's dark days for her. God help her, the poor craythur."





## CHAPTER IX.

### HOW MICKEY KEPT HIS PROMISE.

**T**HE week slipped by, but Nellie was still an invalid. Not strong enough to leave the house, or do more than tidy up Mr. Barker's room, or look after Little Birdie. The blow had been more severe than was at first imagined, and had caused her greater suffering and weakness.

Poor old Meg did all in her power, and worked as hard as her feeble strength would allow; but her earnings were but small, scarcely enough to buy them bread, and now she felt at her wits' ends to know what to do for the best. Mrs. Field had invested her hoarded two shillings in little dainties she thought the children might fancy, or that would tempt Birdie to eat. Mrs. O'Brien had daily called with some little trifle. And as for Mr. Barker, it was wonderful how his appetite had increased, and the reckless extravagance with which he had indulged in small joints of meat,



which he had sent to the baker's, with plenty of potatoes under them, to be baked, and then, suddenly discovering that the cooking was not to his satisfaction, had brought the savoury meal, hot and appetizing, to his lodgers, begging they would eat it for him.

But all her neighbours' kindness and sympathy could not blind Meg's eyes to the fact that want and hard-grinding poverty were coming upon them, and that, unless Nellie was able to resume her place in the Strand, there was nothing but starvation or the workhouse before them. She could not, also, conceal her fears for Birdie, or fail to see that each day the child was growing weaker, her little life slowly ebbing away. Several times had Nellie urged her to sell the silver necklace, but had been startled by the old woman's stern refusal.

"Never, Nellie," she would say. "It's a sacred trust, and one I will not break." And then she would reproach herself for giving way and doubting God's goodness; and, turning away to hide from her dear ones the tears she could not repress, would hurry off to seek for work, or keep out of their way until she was more composed. But no one saw more and felt more for Mrs. Maybrick and the two children than kind-hearted, impulsive Mrs. O'Brien, and one evening she surprised Mickey by bursting into tears

"What is it, mother?" he inquired. "You're not took bad?"

"No, alanna. There's nothing," and she cried the more.

"Tell me then. Is Nellie going to die?" he asked alarmed.

"Throth, an' I hope not; but it's just about her, and the thought of what will become of her makes me contankerous, and not meself at all."

"Ain't they very poor, mother?"

"An' shure I'm just thinkin' they were, Mickey, and wondherin' how we could help them on a bit. God help them, the poor craythurs."

"When I grow a big man I'll work for them and you, mother."

"Sorra a doubt of it, Mickey, bekase you've always been the boy for his mother; but ye're but a babby yet, an' while ye're dhramin' and spakin', shure they may be starvin'. Arrah! but it's grief av my heart when I see how little I can do."

And Mrs. O'Brien flung her apron over her head and rocked herself to and fro. Mickey stared silently at her for a moment, and then limping towards her put his arms around her.

"Mother!"

"Yes, alanna! what is it?"

"I have thought of something."

"What is it? Maybe nothin'," and she rocked herself faster than before.

"Let me go to-morrow with Mrs. Field, she'll wheel me, and sell the flowers as Nellie did."

"To-morra', Mickey?"

"Why shouldn't I? And I've got an idea—a good big one—in my head."

"A saycret, Mickey!" said Mrs. O'Brien reproachfully.

"Will ye trust me, mother? and don't ask me about it, for then if you knows nothin' you can't say nothin' to Nellie."

"Shure, an' I'll trust ye, Mickey. It's the clever and cute one ye've always been, and maybe I've more pride nor to be curious in the matthur."

And Mickey knitted his brows, screwed up his mouth, and gravely nodding his head, said:

"I'll do it."

Mrs. Field was only too glad to join in any plan of assisting Mr. Barker's lodgers, and not only wheeled Mickey to the Strand, but purchased with the money Mrs. O'Brien gave her for the purpose, the most saleable flowers, and helped the boy to dispose of them. But although they sold quickly he seemed disappointed and strangely silent, and was evidently watching for some one who did not make an appearance. The morning wore on, and it would soon be time for Mrs. O'Brien to come and take him home, when she was startled by a cry from the boy:

"Here he comes now, Mrs. Field; I must speak to him." And to her astonishment he had jumped up, caught up his crutches, and was hurrying after the well-known figure of their eccentric purchaser, Mr. Rivers, who evidently had forgotten the flower-sellers, or was in no mood to purchase any from them.

"Hi! hi! stop, sir." And with a tap on the old gentleman's shoulder from his crutch Mickey made him pause and turn round.

"Bless me! what's the matter now?" he said testily. "What do you want, you rude boy? Eh!"

"Beg pardin," and Mickey touched his cap. "I didn't want to hurt you; but I must speak to you. Oh! sir," said the boy earnestly, with big tears trickling down his poor pinched little face. "Don't go away." And limping to his side he stretched out his hand to detain him.

"There, there, what is it?" exclaimed the old gentleman testily. "First a girl waylays me, in the public streets too, and now a boy will not let me pass—it is too bad, it is against law; children should not impede traffic or be allowed in the streets of London by Act of Parliament. Eh!"

"I knows nothing about Parlyment, sir; but I knows Nellie Gray is very bad, and Little Birdie"—but here Mickey's voice faltered, and the poor little fellow broke down.

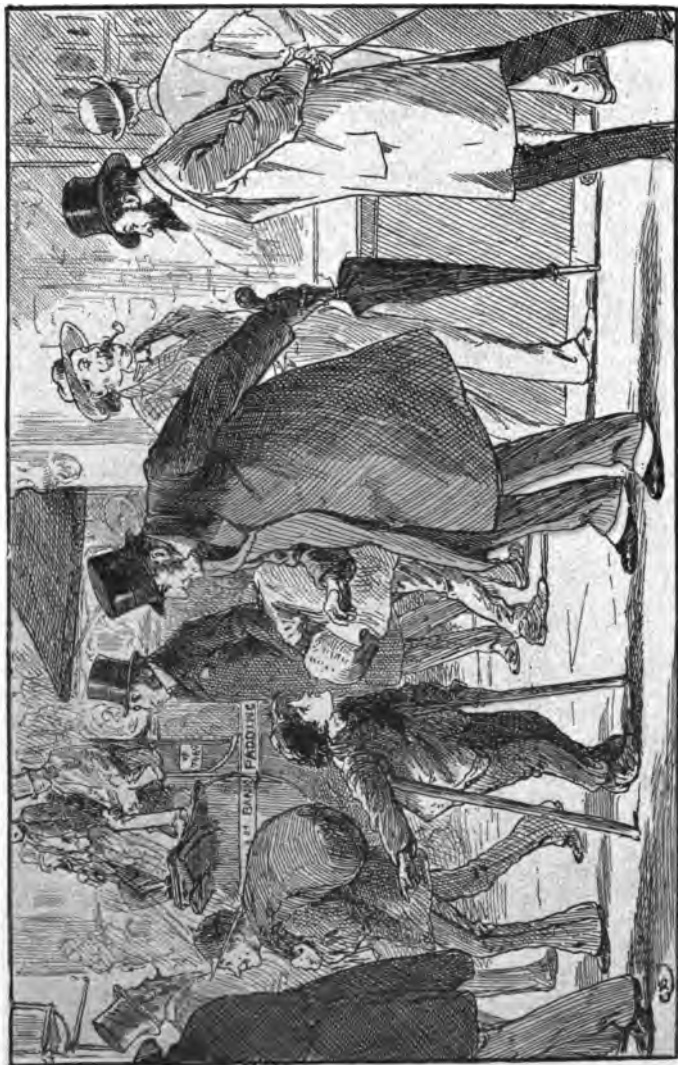
"Eh!" cried Mr. Rivers (for Mickey had guessed his name aright). "Eh! what do you mean? Little What-do-you-call-her ill, and the flower girl too. Bless me! now I come to think of it, I have missed her lately. Here, come with me, boy, and tell me about it." And turning off into one of the side streets, he collared Mickey as if the boy intended running away from him, and held him tightly until he had, with many sobs and choked utterances, related Polly Matthews' misconduct, her savage attack on Nellie, and the increasing illness of Little Birdie.

"Oh! sir," pleaded Mickey, "you're a rich gentleman. You gave Nellie half-a-crown when she was well, and now—now she is ill." And he raised his pitiful wan little face and tearful eyes to Mr. Rivers. "Do help her."

"What made you think of speaking to me? Eh!"

"She wheeled me here before Polly hit her, and you have bought flowers of her when I sat anigh, and you've spoken to me, sir, kindly," and he smiled feebly, "and I didn't forget it; and when mother came home last night and cried, and thought they would have to go to the work'us—she didn't say it, but I knows what she meant—I thought as how if I came here to-day I would see you, and tell you, sir."

"Oh, indeed! and you thought I'd keep them from going there? Eh!"



MICKEY PLEADS FOR LITTLE NELLIE.



But Mickey drew himself up and answered proudly:

"It's only for now I asks you to help them. When I'm a big man," and he nodded his head, "not a little chap as now, I shall work for Nellie and mother and pay you back, sir."

Mr. Rivers for the moment stared blankly at the boy, as if too surprised to speak; then with a chuckle he seized his arm, hailed a passing cab, and gently lifting him into it, told the driver to make as much haste as his horse could take him.

"But where to, sir?" asked the man.

"Bless me! how do I know?" exclaimed Mr. Rivers sharply. "Ask the boy; it is he taking me on the wild goose errand. I can tell nothing about it, only he will pay me when he is a man." And evidently tickled at the joke he leant back in the cab and laughed quite pleasantly.

But Mrs. Field was on the watch, and hurrying forward gave the old soldier's address; and to Mickey's intense delight the cab set off, and for the first time in his life he found himself driving through the London streets in a real cab, with the funniest, queerest old gentleman as a companion.

For the first few minutes the boy felt a little afraid of him, and wondered what made him so lively. He did nothing but stare at Mickey with his sharp gray eyes, and then would chuckle, wag his head from side to side, and laugh until the



tears ran down his cheeks, ejaculating at the same time, "Bless me! Well, well! and so you'll pay me, eh?"

But he became quieter and more silent as they left the Strand and took some short cuts through foul, squalid, crowded streets, and seemed very thoughtful, when the cab, with a jerk that flung him almost on to Mickey's lap, drew up at 9 Golden Square.

Mr. Barker answered the cabman's loud rat-at-tat before one could say Jack Robinson, possibly thinking it was a customer, and hobbling to the door assisted Mr. Rivers to alight.

Mickey could not, as he slowly followed, catch all that passed between them, but tears rose to his eyes as he heard Big Ben say:

"They call her Little Birdie, sir; but I think she won't be here long. She's just fluttering her wings to fly away from storm and tempest, and," pointing upward, "take shelter there, safe, safe, sir, on her Saviour's breast."

And then, still talking very earnestly, he saw Mr. Barker lead the way up the narrow stairs, Mr. Rivers following.

It was one of Birdie's bad days, and she was now lying on her little bed, with closed eyes, too weak to say or do anything but hold Nellie's hand clasped tightly within her own.

Old Meg was stirring some gruel by the fire,

and Nellie, pale, with sad care-worn face, was bending over her sister.

The room was close and stuffy. Through the open windows streamed in God's welcome sunshine, but every puff of wind as it swept by flooded the small place with thick gritty London dust.

Nellie started back with surprise and delight as Mr. Barker, standing at the open door, announced, "A visitor," and, hardly conscious of what she was doing, only with the glad grateful feeling "he would help them," she ran over to Mr. Rivers, and laying her hand on his arm, burst into tears.

"Oh! how good, sir. Oh! how kind of you to come," was all she could exclaim.

He drew her hand into his, and looked as he had done on the night of their first meeting, with a sad troubled expression.

"My child," he said, so gently Nellie could hardly believe it was the same voice, "I should have come before, but I only knew from a little cripple to-day of your suffering and need of assistance. And this is Little—"

"Birdie, sir," said Nellie.

"Little Birdie, Little Birdie," he repeated softly, then turning to Old Meg he bowed with an old-fashioned courtesy, as if she had been the greatest lady in the land, and said:

"You are the kind friend who supports these little ones?"

"I do the best I can, sir," answered Meg humbly.

He glanced around the small room, and appeared struck by its neatness and cleanliness, despite its evident poverty, and then his gaze rested on Nellie, leaning once more over the sick child, and on Birdie's sweet fair babyish face.

"Are you in pain, little one?" he asked.

"No," was the whispered answer. "I am only so tired."

"Tired of London noise and smoke, my dear," and he took up the small feverish hot hand and held it within his own. "But do you not think you would feel better and stronger if you were far away in the country, with the beautiful green fields, the trees and birds, and blue skies above?"

Birdie opened her blue eyes in amazement.

"Yes," she answered, "if Nellie and Meg are with me too."

"Of course, bless me! of course, my dear. They shall be with you, and, please God, you will try there and get well. Eh!"

The child gave a faint smile. "I'll try," was the answer, in so low a voice Mr. Rivers had to stoop to catch what she said, "if they want me to."

He turned once more to Meg.

"Mrs.—?"

"Maybrick, sir," she answered, dropping him a courtesy.

"Yes, yes! Mrs. Maybrick, of course. You must leave this at once; this unwholesome air is killing that dear child. And my little friend here," and he pointed to Nellie, "looks as if fresh country air would do her good also."

"Yes, sir," said poor Meg. "If I could give it to them, God knows how willingly I would do so. But—"

"There, there; leave it to me. I know of a large farm, with plenty of sheep, and cows, and ducks, and chickens, and everything you would like. It is kept by an old client of mine. I obliged her once, and she is always anxious to oblige me. I will write at once to her, she will telegraph back, and you must be ready to leave this as soon as you hear from me."

"Oh! sir," said Nellie, "it seems too good to be true!" and clasping Birdie tightly to her she looked up with tearful eyes.

"There, that will do. You quite understand? Good-bye, my dear children. You shall get well, Little What's-your-name? Thank you, ma'am," as Meg came to the door with him. "There, make use of that; get what you want for the little ones and yourself. I shall arrange expenses," and slipping a couple of sovereigns into

her hand he hurried down the stairs, leaving her speechless with amazement.

The old soldier, busily engaged in heeling a boot and talking to Mickey (who looked very comfortable perched on a high chair near him), awaited his return, and then hobbling to the window there was a long whispered consultation, in which Nellie's name was frequently mentioned.

When it was over Mr. Rivers said, clearing his voice, and speaking rather huskily:

"She set me, who am so irritable, an example of endurance, fortitude, and sweet unselfishness. I ought to have believed her story—her very face is truth; but my time is so much occupied, and I have so much to think of, it was not wilfully I forgot her. But we owe all to this brave boy," and he turned to Mickey.

The boy's face flushed with delight at the praise accorded him, but he only answered:

"I'm not brave, sir. I'm a cripple."

"Bless me! so you are; but brave still in endeavouring as a poor weak child to work for her, and in not being afraid of so cross an old fellow as I am. But I shall not forget you, my boy. God has blessed me with means, and let me try to use them in endeavouring to alleviate some of the misery around, and making some poor sorrowing creatures the happier. I cannot stay longer now, but I shall see you again and talk to

your mother;" and bidding Mr. Barker "Good-day," with a sad thoughtful face, Mr. Rivers stepped into the cab that was still waiting, and drove off.

The news of Nellie Gray's "good fortune" spread like wild-fire, and soon caused the greatest excitement in the neighbourhood. This was further increased when old Meg was seen early the next morning returning from the nearest draper's, laden with packages and parcels, and it reached a climax when at noon a cab was seen standing at Mr. Barker's door, his lodger's modest luggage placed upon it, and he, dressed in his Sunday suit and wearing his medals, emerging with Little Birdie in his arms. Then it became rapidly known the old soldier was going himself to take care of the children and Mrs. Maybrick, and was actually giving himself a holiday for the occasion.

But in the home they were leaving Nellie was bidding a tender adieu to the kind friends from whom she was parting.

Mrs. Field, with Winnie and Minnie, were there to say good-bye, and to have a shilling each slipped into their little hands by old Meg, who in this way tried to repay their hard-working, kind-hearted mother.

Mrs. O'Brien was trying her best to say some parting words to Nellie, but broke down before

she could find voice to utter them, and Mickey, striving to keep up like a man, was sobbing as if his heart would break.

"You'll just forget us, Nellie," he said, looking up wistfully in her face, "and won't keep your promise of writing—"

"But I will, Mickey, dear. You shall have a long letter very soon. And I'll send you some pretty flowers, not bought ones, I will pick them myself. Do you think I could ever forget you, Mickey, or be ungrateful? Why, we owe all this to you, dear."

His eyes sparkled.

"And you're glad I went after the gentleman?"

"Indeed I am, Mickey. You said, do you remember, if you could be of use to me you would be, and I'm sure you kept your promise."

"But I didn't wait until I grew up to be a man," answered Mickey ruefully.

"No, dear, but you did what was better," said Nellie gently, "you did not lose any time when you could do a kindness; and I'm sure to do good when one can is better than waiting for a time that may never come. You kept your word to me, and I will never forget you—never!"

And now a reminder from Mr. Barker, "Time and the train wait for no man," made them hurry to the cab, and with many farewells and parting good wishes they drove away, Little Birdie to

the last waving her hand from the window, and saying, "Good-bye, Golden Square; good-bye!"

Nellie could never recall that journey, but as though it had appeared to her in a dream. Hot, dusty London soon disappeared; then came blue skies, meadows, pretty cottages, grand houses with happy children playing on green lawns; hedges filled with fragrant hawthorn buds; pleasant lanes and long dusty roads, with trees arching overhead, and flickering gleams of light and shadow, and it was growing late in the afternoon when she was aroused by the train stopping, the guard calling "Shirley! Shirley!" in his loudest voice, and Mr. Barker telling her this was Shirley station and their destination, and helping them to alight.

She could remember Birdie's delight at seeing a wagon, with the biggest, fattest, of white horses awaiting them: Mr. Barker carefully lifting the child in, and the pleasant musical jingle of the horses' bells, and the wagoner cracking his whip and whistling merrily all the way.

It was a pleasant drive through shady lanes, with banks of ferns, meadow-sweet, and bluebells, and it ended at a rustic gate leading into a garden full of gillyflowers and other gay blossoms, and there was a quaint, red-bricked, old-fashioned house beyond, with ivy and clustering creepers growing up, and half concealing the tiny latticed-



paned windows. The door was open, and such a rosy-cheeked, comely, dark-eyed woman hurried from the rose-wreathed porch and down the gravel path to welcome them.

"Here beest missus," said the wagoner, as he pointed to Mrs. Meadows, "she coom to look arter thee."

And as she spoke she had opened the gate and was already welcoming them with smiles and kind words:

"And this is the little invalid," she said. "Ah! well we must see what country air will do in making her strong and well again, and in bringing back the colour to her pretty cheeks. Here, come to me, dear, and I will carry you to the house. And is this your sister?" as Nellie with Mr. Barker's rose-tree in her hand, prepared to descend. "How do you do, my dear? What a pretty rose-tree you have! see, there are buds coming on it already; why, it will bloom before ours! And you, ma'am, I hope you are not tired; but it's a long journey when one isn't strong. And how are you, sir? Mr. Rivers said you would kindly take care of this good lady and the dear children. My husband will be in from the fields soon, and will be very pleased to make your acquaintance, and have a chat about London. We're country folks," and she gave such a pleasant smile that Little Birdie nestled up con-

fidingly to her, "but we dearly love hearing of London doings and all its news. Come, Jim, take the box and give it to Sarah. And now, ma'am, if you don't mind following me, we'll go in and have some tea. I got it all ready when I heard Jim's whistling and Dobbin's bells up the lane."

And so chatting cheerily she led the way through the sweet-scented garden to such a pretty cosy room, where the tea was laid out, with cold meat, golden honey, delicious bread and butter, and a hot cake.

"But perhaps you would like to bathe your face first?"

"Thank you, ma'am," replied old Meg, "we should like to tidy ourselves a bit before we sat down, if it is not troubling you."

"Oh, no trouble whatever," answered Mrs. Meadows smiling; "let me show you your rooms," and she led the way upstairs and showed them into two of the most comfortable bed-rooms Nellie had ever seen.

One led into the other, and in the largest were two of the prettiest little beds, with muslin curtains looped back by pink bows, a dainty little dressing-table, a quaint old-fashioned wardrobe, and everything, even to a bunch of primroses and violets in a brown jug on the window-sill, arranged for their coming.

Birdie could not refrain from expressing her delight.

"Oh, Nellie dear, isn't it lovely?" and as the contrast of this pleasant place to the dingy, dirty neighbourhood they had just left flashed across Nellie's mind, she could not help exclaiming, "Oh, Birdie, darling, to think we owe all this to little Mickey and our kind good friend, Mr. Rivers."

Mr. Barker was pacing the room in the greatest perturbation when Mrs. Meadows entered, and there was a troubled, puzzled expression on his face so different to the usual bright happy look of the old soldier that it startled his hostess.

"Dear me! I hope, sir, you are not ill? John, that's my husband, will not be long."

But Mr. Barker still remained silent, only turning and looking at her so intently. The poor woman for the moment feared he had lost his senses, so hardly knowing what she was saying, she added,

"I see you are a soldier by your medals, Mister—;" and she hesitated, for Mr. Rivers had mentioned that an old soldier would escort her lodgers, but had given no name, only asking her to receive him with civility, as he was a very respectable man, and had been most kind to Mrs. Maybrick and the children.

"Mister—?" she again faltered.

"Benjamin Barker, ma'am."

It was now Mrs. Meadows' turn to look surprised, and her rosy face grew pale as she asked eagerly,

"Ben Barker of Cherry Tree Farm, who listed?"

"The same;" and the gray eyes glanced brightly at her.

"Oh, my, it cannot be! Ben, Ben, do you not know me?"

"Anne!"

And the next minute, half-laughing, half-crying, she was clasped in her brother's arms.

"Oh, Ben, who'd have thought it! Where have you been all these years? and why didn't you answer our advertisements?"

"Because I never saw them. Ah! I expect that was when I was in hospital or just after I left the service. But why didn't you answer my letters?"

"Your letters?" exclaimed Mrs. Meadows in surprise; "I never received any."

"I wrote twice," replied her brother, "to the farm, and they were returned to me as 'Unknown' through the Dead-letter Office."

"Oh, Ben!" she answered, smiling through her tears, "I see how all this trouble and mistake have come about. My poor husband died, and I left the village and travelled about as house-

keeper with a dear lady who is dead and gone, and I met John Meadows and married him, and came and settled here."

"Right you are!" returned Big Ben; "of course I understand all now. I never thought of your name being different, but I seemed to know your face directly I clapped my eyes upon you. Well, there's no 'chance;' the Almighty orders everything; but if this isn't the queerest go I ever came across. After all these long years to think of our meeting again; and all through those lodgers of mine. Anne, dear, you will be kind to them for my sake?"

"And their own sakes too," laughed Mrs. Meadows.

"Aye, aye; you'll do what's right, or you wouldn't be so like mother. Ah! she was a rare good woman. But isn't this your husband?" as a round-faced, jolly-looking old farmer came up the garden.

"Yes, that's John; oh, won't he be surprised? John! John! come in; I've something to tell you."

And John certainly was surprised and almost as pleased as his wife at hearing who Big Ben was and the relationship between them.



## CHAPTER X.

### UNCLE HUGH TRIES TO REMEMBER.

“**H**ERE comes the gee-gee!” cried Trottie, as, standing at the hall door, she watched the wagonette making its appearance.

“Me going a big drive; oh, ever so big!” and she opened her blue eyes to the utmost, and extended her little hands to show how great was the distance.

“And me take my dollies and a-go to put them in.”

“Stop, Miss Trottie,” said nurse, “you will fall;” but the child was down the steps dragging one most forlorn doll by the leg, and then holding it up for Wilson, the coachman’s, inspection.

“Well, missy, it is not a beauty,” was all he could say; “but give it to me; I’ll look after the others if you want to take them, and whatever else you wish to put in.”

But that was just the difficult question to decide. Trottie would have liked the whole

dozen of the dollies to have benefited by the drive. She knew she could not take too much, and yet her affection and inclination wavered between them and a woolly lamb, a monkey with a drum, and a spotted horse with a flowing mane and a long lovely tail that she delighted each night to put into curl-papers; but while debating the matter in her baby mind, Norman coming along caught her up in his arms, and, depositing her on the nearest seat, flung the dollies, with lamb, monkey, and spotted horse after her, and then clambered into the wagonette with a merry laugh.

It must be confessed Lina at the last moment almost repented not having accompanied them, and it was with a sigh of regret that she saw the wagonette with its freight drive away, but a glance at her aunt made her feel ashamed of such irresolution, and for the first time in her life she experienced the happiness of self-denial, the pleasure of thinking of others before herself.

"Are you sorry you have not gone?" said Aunt Elsie, as she watched the varying expression of the child's face.

"No, auntie," answered Lina firmly, and looking up frankly at her, "I am not sorry, I am very glad."

"Thanks, dear;" and by those two words Lina felt more than repaid.

"And now, my child, I have something to propose. Will you come with me to-morrow to the Farm?"

"To-morrow!" cried Lina, delighted. "Oh, yes, auntie. Are you going to see Mrs. Meadows?"

"Well, dear, I will tell you why I am going. Your uncle is much interested in a poor woman and two little girls whom he befriended in London. The youngest child is very ill, so ill that Dr. Harcourt, who has been to see her, thinks she will not live much longer. Your uncle found them in great poverty and distress in some close unhealthy part of London. It was thought that this poor little child might linger a little longer even if she did not recover, if removed to the country. He wrote to Mrs. Meadows, one of the best, the kindest of women, asking her to take them in, and saying he would defray expenses, but in the most generous manner she has refused to take a penny, and is as much interested in these poor children as if they were her own; so I sent a few little dainties to-day by nurse, and have promised your uncle I will go to-morrow and see the little invalid and her sister."

"Oh, auntie, how"—"jolly," Lina would have said, but remembering her aunt considered the word unladylike, she substituted "nice" in its stead.

"And now, my child. as Miss Wharton is writ-



ing something for Norman, and I have told her to-day must be a holiday, will you help me turn out the store-closet?"

Lina needed no second bidding; to turn out the store-cupboard, and dive into its delicious mysteries of cake, jam, preserved fruits, and everything else "good" it contained, had always been looked upon by Gip and herself, yes, and even Norman, as one of the greatest treats Aunt Elsie or their mama could give them. And many an afternoon when nothing else could be thought of to amuse them and keep them employed, to rearrange the contents, and peep into unknown parcels, blue jars, and all sorts of things tempting and appetizing, had been a delight to look back upon and speak of in the future.

For Lina, busy and bright as a bee, the afternoon soon passed, and she had just mounted the steps to reach a jar of preserved apricots, when, her foot slipping, she would have fallen had not Aunt Elsie caught her in her arms. Lina, clasped in her embrace, tried to recover her balance, when the trimming of her dress caught in a locket Mrs. Howard wore, attached to a piece of black velvet around her throat, and tore it open.

"Oh, auntie," she cried, "what a pretty baby, what a darling little face! Is it—" and then remembering nurse had told her unless Mrs. Howard spoke of her dead baby she was not to

mention it, she stopped and looked up distressed and silent.

"It is a miniature of my child," replied Aunt Elsie, pale and sorrowful, "of my precious baby darling I lost so many years ago. Did you never know, Lina dear, I had a little child?"

"Nurse told us to-day, auntie, your baby was drowned. Was it wrong of her to do so?"

"No, my dear," was the low, sad answer. "I cannot tell why, unless it was owing to my illness, I was not allowed to talk of her or to hear her name mentioned, but no one can tell how I have longed to do so, and how hard it was to see you all growing up knowing nothing of your little dead cousin."

"Oh, auntie, darling," cried Lina, flinging her arms around her, "tell me all about her. What a lovely baby she must have been!" and she looked long and earnestly on the face of the laughing, dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked little lost one.

"There is not much to tell, dear," was the weeping answer. "Your dear uncle was stationed at Delhi, there his health gave way, and baby, our little Haidée, was ailing. The doctor said our only chance of rearing her was in sending her to England. We brought her down to Calcutta with her nurse, one of the best and most faithful of women, Mrs. Cameron, the wife of one of my husband's sergeants. We saw them embark on

board the *Conway Castle*, bound for England. On their arrival Mrs. Cameron was to take our darling to your grandpapa's; he was a clergyman, as you know, living at Mildon Rectory, and she was to remain there until our return from India, but alas! God willed it otherwise. His purposes are not ours. My dear husband—"

"Yes, I know, auntie. Uncle died at Delhi, and you came home, mama told me that; but what became of the baby?"

Mrs. Howard buried her face in her hands and was silent for a moment, and then added brokenly,

"The *Conway Castle* was burned at sea, and every soul on board perished."

"Oh, auntie!" cried Lina, shocked and distressed, "and the little darling—"

"She must have died with her nurse, dear. The vessel was seen in flames, I think it was off the Cornish coast, but a fearful storm was raging at the time, and no assistance could be rendered, and she went down almost in sight of land, and my child sank with her."

"Poor little baby!" said Lina gently; "dear little cousin Haidée! Oh, auntie, I am so sorry!" and she drew the sweet sad face towards her, and pillowed it on her shoulder.

"My darling!" and Mrs. Howard tried to speak calmly; "I must not repine, heavy as the blow was, widowed, and childless, I have tried hard

to bear it patiently and without murmuring, knowing whose hand dealt it, and that it must be for the best. I suppose it is your speaking of my loss, but it all seems to come back to me, my loneliness, my desolation, my imposed silence, but it will not be for long. Life at the very longest is but a short journey, and I look forward, Lina, night and day, to a reunion with my loved ones. Ah, child, in that blest home, where they await me, I shall meet them again. There will be no more pain, no tears, no sorrow, and *no more sea.*"

"No, auntie," whispered Lina softly. "For the sea shall give up its dead, and Haidée, little Haidée, a beautiful bright angel, is safe for ever."

"Yes, child, yes; in her Father's home of many mansions."

And now the sun is throwing longer shadows, and slowly sinking behind a bank of gold and purple splendour, as Lina and Mrs. Howard, the latter pale but composed, stand on the door-steps watching for the return of the wagonette.

"Why, Lina, is not that Nep barking? I thought Wilson said he would not take him to-day, but would leave him fastened up in his kennel."

"Well, it is Nep, auntie. I know his bark. He must have got loose, as he has done before, and run after the wagonette. Ah, here it comes."

And there it was, sure enough, Nep, a hand-

some brown retriever and favourite dog of Colonel North's, running wildly in advance, and keeping up a continued hoarse bark of delight, and Trottie standing on the seat by nurse's side, waving a huge bunch of lilac, laburnum, and fragrant hawthorn; and Norman, Gip, and even Uncle Hugh laden with primroses, daffodils, and other buds and blossoms that make earth fair and beautiful.

"Oh, auntie!" cried Norman, jumping down and extending his arms to catch Trottie, who with her dollies and flowers seemed to have enough to do to stand steadily on her sturdy little legs.

"You do not know what a jolly afternoon we've had. And fancy, dear old Nep"—and he patted the dog's head, as, thumping its tail in an irresistible wag of self-approbation, it looked up with its honest brown eyes—"following us; he must have known we had gone, for we didn't get to the end of the village before he came after us. Didn't you, old boy?"

"Here, uncle, I'll give you a lift down. And see, haven't we brought you flowers?"

"Me get oo fowdies," whispered Trottie, holding up her pretty face to be kissed. "Me pick oo dis booty," and she produced a faded daffodil, with drooping head and broken stem.

"And this is for you, dear," cried Gip, as with

a kiss she put a bunch of lovely violets into Lina's hand, "we found them in the hollow by the old beech-tree; and these primroses are for you, darling auntie."

"Thank you, dear," and Mrs. Howard took them with a loving smile. "How good of you to think of me! But what is the matter with Trottie's hand?" as she noticed one dimpled little fist carefully enveloped in a pocket handkerchief.

"Ah!" said Uncle Hugh, shaking his head and trying to look grave, "it's a serious thing, bless me! a serious thing. There, there, child, tell your auntie how it happened."

"Go on, Trottie," exclaimed Norman, "auntie and Lina are listening; tell them about it."

"It's velly bad," said Trottie, regarding the injured little hand.

"Yes, dear, but what was it?" said Lina.

"A big ugly wops," said Trottie.

"A wasp!" and Aunt Elsie caught the child up in her arms. "A wasp; did it sting you?"

Trottie nodded her curly head. It was something novel for her to play the part of an interesting invalid, and she was determined to make the most of it.

"Me drop dolly—me booful dolly—and me go a pick her up, and—"

Here she held out the hand to be inspected,

evidently delighted at thus being the object of commiseration.

"Poor darling!" said auntie, kissing the place to make it well. "Did it hurt much?"

"It nasty horrid thing," she replied, "it comed dere when I pick dolly up, and it creep, creep, and walk a big way; and me say, 'Go off, oo ugly wops,' but he not go," and she shook her head dolefully.

"Oh, he was naughty! and what else did he do?"

"Den he sit down dere, and hurted me velly velly bad."

"But it's all right now," said nurse, who was waiting to carry the child upstairs, and "ready to drop," as she expressed it, "for a cup of tea." "Mrs. Meadows put some oil upon it, and it's quite well now. Come, there's a dearie, you must be tired."

"But me not cry," continued Trottie heroically, and looking round as if to quiet any uneasiness on that score. "Me brave big 'ittle girl. Me say 'Naughty wops,' and shake my hand so, and den he flewed right away, and never comed back a-me," and with this comforting assurance she allowed nurse to carry her off, and was soon in her little bed fast asleep, and the naughty wops forgotten in the land of dreams.

"And now tell me, my dears," said Aunt Elsie

as they gathered round the tea-table, "how did you find the little invalid?"

"What do you say, aunt?" inquired Norman, who, seated next to Miss Wharton, and busily engaged in buttering a huge hunch of bread, had just informed her "he was as hungry as old boots," and had been reprimanded by her for talking in such a manner before ladies.

"All right," was the rejoinder, "then I'll be as polite as old boots. What did you say, auntie?"

There was a pause as Mrs. Howard repeated the question, and both he and Gip glanced at Uncle Hugh to answer it.

"She is," began Norman—"oh, hang it! uncle, you tell her, I hate to see her cry,—she is such a dear tender-hearted thing."

"Bless me! so she is," said the old gentleman. "You're right, my boy, never distress or fret your aunt, she's had trouble enough, trouble enough. Eh!" and as Mrs. Howard once more inquired for Birdie, he cleared his throat with a loud ahem! and answered:

"Not very well, Elsie," then, seeing her look of concern he hurriedly added: "Go and see the child, she cannot live many days. Poor little—what's her name?—poor little girl."

"How did you find her out, uncle?" asked Gip. "They spoke so much of your kindness."



"Did they, my dear?" and Uncle Hugh, stirring his tea vigorously, and sipping it to swallow down a lump in his throat, told them how, on his way from his office in Gray's Inn to his lodgings in Suffolk Street, he had accidentally upset Nellie Gray's basket of flowers, of his having watched for her, of Mickey running after him, of his visit to Golden Square, and finally of his sending old Meg and the children to Willow Farm.

Those around listened eagerly.

"Oh, auntie!" said Gip, "I wish you had been with us; we had such a pleasant ramble through Shirley Wood. The birds were singing so beautifully, and we heard the cuckoo; and the flowers were so lovely. But we did not want to stay too long, we were so anxious to see Nellie Gray and the poor sick child."

"Do go to-morrow, auntie," cried Norman eagerly. "Little Birdie is a sweet little thing; but wait until you see Nellie Gray, she is a jolly pretty girl."

"Jolly," answered Lina; "there's a horrid word. What is a jolly pretty girl?"

"Well, I don't know what you call her," was the reply. "She is such a pretty, sad, quiet, gentle creature, and—"

Here Norman paused; tears were actually in his blue eyes.

"She *does* love her little sister, and is so patient, so gentle, and not a bit timid or shy, but so sensible and thoughtful. I never saw such a joll—I mean, nice girl."

"Is she fair or dark?" inquired Lina.

"Dark eyes; and such hair! why it would make you two girls, and mine, and Miss Wharton's, yes, and auntie's too, look nothing beside it! Isn't her hair beautifully thick, uncle?"

Mr. Rivers glanced at his nephew.

"Nellie Gray?" he asked; "are you talking of her? Do you know, Elsie, the child reminds me of some one. Bless me, how stupid! I can't think who. There, there, my dear; it's a face of the long ago that comes and goes, I cannot tell where I've seen it. Eh!"

This interjection was addressed to Norman, who was telling Miss Wharton and Lina of Mrs. Meadows finding her soldier brother, whom she had long thought dead, in Mrs. Maybrick's landlord.

"He has gone to London," continued the boy, "to sell off his furniture, and is coming to live at Willow Farm. Won't it be jolly; fancy having a real soldier here, with medals like papa."

"Ah, yes!" said Mr. Rivers, coming out of his reverie. "It was very singular Barker being Mrs. Meadows' brother. He is a cobbler, and will mend them. But where could I have seen that

child's face? Dear me! what strange things happen. There, there, Elsie; it comes again, and I know it well; but I shall find it out, I shall find it out!"





## CHAPTER XI.

### AUNT ELSIE MAKES A DISCOVERY.



LINA was up betimes in the morning, and not only practised carefully her scales and exercises, but surprised Miss Wharton by asking if she might have "a longer lesson and a new piece of music?" a request with which that lady readily complied by giving her a gavotte which Lina had always wished to learn. So diligently had she applied herself to her lessons, that she not only mastered the obnoxious Roman emperors, but wrote correctly several French exercises, and acquitted herself so well at her other studies, that Miss Wharton brightened up considerably, and expressed to Mrs. Howard her opinion that there was much ability in the child, who by gaining more control over her temper, and with judicious management, would develop into one of the most amiable, clever, and promising of pupils, and become an admirable character.

And now the pony carriage was at the door, and Aunt Elsie was taking the reins from Wilson.

Trottie had made a large parcel of half-a-dozen dolls she wished Lina to take as a "pesant" (she meant present) to the little sick girl, and running down the steps thrust something into her hand.

It was the spotted gee-gee, minus its head (that having unfortunately tumbled off owing to a fall it had had that morning), but with its tail in a dozen curl-papers it was still perfection in its little mistress' eyes.

"Oh! Trottie dear," cried Lina, "I can't take this"—"horrid thing," she would have said, but a glance at the wistful baby face checked her.

"No, miss," said nurse. "You cannot give a horse to that sick child with its tail not even combed or brushed. What would she think of Miss Trottie's untidiness? Here, give it to me," and she snatched it from her, "and let me glue on its head and tie up its tail with a blue ribbon, to make it look nice and pretty. Ah! here comes Nep." And as the dog came bounding up the path with a joyous bark, and Trottie stooped to pat him, the pony carriage with Mrs. Howard and Lina drove away, leaving Nep, noisy and demonstrative, to hurry after it.

At Willow Farm Little Birdie, lying on a couch by the open window, watched eagerly for their coming.

For the first few days after her arrival she had seemed stronger. The fresh country air, the nourishing food, the entire change from the smoke and unhealthiness of Golden Square, had certainly benefited her, but it had only been a momentary flash of life's little flame, and now she was gradually, painlessly sinking.

Gentle and loving, she could never thank those around sufficiently, or be grateful enough for their unwearying kindness, but in many a childish way tried to show how much she appreciated it.

There was Mrs. Meadows, ever on the trot to get her this or that, or ransacking her brains and cupboards to find something more to please her; good old Farmer Meadows, who would never see her without a kind word, and a hope she would soon be all right again; and Dick, their sturdy son, who would carry her in his strong young arms to the seat under the old thorn, where, in its spreading shade, she could enjoy the fresh air and scene around. The meadows silvered with daisies and golden with buttercups, the lilac-trees out in fragrant blossom, the mossy banks bright and gay with primroses and violets, all interested and pleased her; but she would turn from even spring's beauty and earth's loveliness to catch a glimpse of old Meg's kind face, or to nestle once again to Nellie, and feel the clasp of her loving

hands. And it was Nellie now who, sitting beside her, tried to amuse her by reading Mickey's last letter, written in a big sprawling hand, but full of kind words, and hopes that they would soon return.

"And did he get the flowers you sent by Mr. Barker?" said Birdie, raising herself up to look at Mickey's writing.

"Yes, dear; and liked them so much. And he and Mrs. O'Brien thought it so kind of Mrs. Meadows sending them the big cake, and home-made loaf, and beautiful butter. And Mickey says 'he hopes to be able to come and see us,' as she has asked him to do so in the summer, and then he will really know what green fields are, and how the flowers grow, and what the pretty country is like. And is it not good of Mrs. Meadows? Mr. Barker told Meg she sent a whole sovereign to Mrs. Field, and says she will try and get her work here, and Winnie and Minnie will grow strong and well then—"

"Does it not seem a long, long time ago," said Birdie thoughtfully, "since we were in London? Sometimes"—and she looked earnestly at Nellie—"it all seems like a dream."

"Dear heart," cried Meg just entering the room, "it's a very pleasant one; and if we can only see you well and strong again—"

But Birdie shook her head, and nestled closer to Nellie.

"I should like to see those ladies again, and that young gentleman and Mr. Rivers. Were they not kind and good? And that dear little girl, such a pretty baby, wasn't she, Nellie?"

"Yes, darling," and Nellie bent fondly over her.

"You will love them all, but that baby the best; won't you, dear?" And the child lay wearily back on the cushion.

"Love her best!" said old Meg. "Why, dear heart, should she like her better than those other dear children?"

But Little Birdie was silent; perhaps intuitively she felt Trottie was nearer her own age, and if it were possible would in some way fill her vacant place.

For a few minutes there was silence, broken by Nellie exclaiming:

"Oh, Birdie, here they come!"

And as Mrs. Howard and Lina passed up the garden, Birdie roused herself and softly whispered:

"Oh, Nellie, what a beautiful lady! Isn't she just like a picture? I am sure you will like her, she looks so good. How glad I am they've come!"

As long as Nellie lives she will never forget that afternoon. Other memories may come and go, but that one, clear and distinct, will ever stand out from all others.



How sweet, how gentle Mrs. Howard was! Had she known Birdie from her earliest days she could not have been more tenderly interested, more loving and sympathizing. And how softly and kindly she spoke to Nellie and to old Meg! It might have been fancy, but Nellie felt sure those sad dark eyes seemed to seek her out, their gentle gaze to follow her, and more than once she found the kind lady's earnest glance resting on her, her small white hand upon her shoulder.

And Lina, too, what a pretty young lady she was! And how quietly and nicely she tried to amuse Little Birdie, who smiled and seemed pleased as Trottie's dollies were unpacked, and given to her one after the other. And how interested they both seemed in old Meg, and all she could tell them of Barbara Gray. And why was it, when Mrs. Howard heard their former home was on the Cornish coast, her eyes filled with tears, and she listened even more eagerly.

And how beautifully she read to Birdie, and talked to her of heaven's glories and a Saviour's love for little children. And how earnestly she prayed—old Meg and Mrs. Meadows and the young lady and herself kneeling around—and asked for strength to bear whatever sorrows their heavenly Father saw fit to send, and to endeavour meekly to say, "Lord, thou knowest best; teach us to say, Thy will be done."

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And then when it was time to leave them, how tenderly and soothingly she bent over little Birdie, whispering soft gentle comforting words. And why was it she caught her (only Birdie's sister) in her arms, and pressing her to her breast, murmured, "God be with thee, my child; may His blessing rest upon thee?" And when Birdie, waving her hand, called out in her faint voice, "You'll come again soon," how kindly, and with what a pleasant smile she answered, "Yes, dear, to-morrow."

And how much better and stronger Birdie seemed that night, and how strange it was, while Nellie was bidding her good-night, that she should fling her arms around her neck and say:

"Nellie, I want you to do something for me."

And that when she answered, smiling through her tears, "My darling, you know I would do anything I could to please you," Birdie should say:

"I want you to wear your necklace to-morrow and look like a real lady. I want that dear kind lady to see you nice and pretty. Will you promise you will ask Meg to let you?"

And although Nellie promised she would, the idea still seemed to haunt the child; for twice during the long hours of night she called her to her and again said, "Will you wear it? Do, Nellie, to please me."

And so, Meg's consent having been obtained,

Nellie, the next afternoon, with trembling fingers clasped it around her neck—only feeling the while how glad she was to be able to please her little sister—and hastily brushing back her long beautiful hair, hurried down the stairs in time timidly to greet Mrs. Howard, who was bending over Birdie's couch, and taking some large luscious foreign grapes from a basket to give the sick child.

"Ah! my dear," she said, with a kind smile, and glancing at Gip and Lina, "you see we have come to you again, and brought something little Birdie may fancy. But, child!" and the basket dropped from her trembling hands, as with a startled cry she sprang to Nellie's side. "That necklet, where did you get it?" And pushing back the girl's hair she unclasped it from Nellie's neck, and, with white face and dilated eyes, held it towards Meg. "Mrs. Maybrick, for God's sake tell me, where did this come from?"

"It was mother's," said Nellie in a low voice, while Gip, Lina, Mrs. Meadows, and Meg pressed eagerly around.

"But who gave it to her? Oh! Mrs. Maybrick, Mrs. Meadows, if either of you know," and she stretched out appealingly her hands, "anything of this necklet, tell me—tell a wretched mother. Child!" and she turned once more to Nellie, "this necklet I had made for my little one. It is of

Delhi workmanship, and I clasped it round my darling's neck the day she sailed in the *Conway Castle*. Look here!" and she touched a spring in the centre pendant, "there is my likeness—I, her heart-broken mother. Can you not see it? and a lock, on the other side, of her father's hair. How did it come into your possession?"

But white and trembling Nellie could only look at Meg.

"Tell the lady," she whispered, "it was mother's."

But old Meg pushed forward and answered calmly and gravely:

"That necklet, madam, belongs to the child, but not to Barbara Gray."

For a moment Nellie stared wildly around. What could old Meg mean. Ah, it was like some hideous nightmare from which she would soon awaken. If not her mother's, how could it be hers? But she was aroused to consciousness by Mrs. Howard exclaiming:

"Tell me, are these children sisters?"

"No, madam; no relationship exists between them. Let me tell you all I know of Nellie's history. She was picked up at sea by Davie Gray, and adopted by him and his wife—"

"Oh! my God, I thank thee," cried Mrs. Howard. "It is my child, surely. The sea has given up my lost one, my precious wee one-year-

old baby." And clasping Nellie in her embrace she burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

"And are you not my own sister?" said Birdie.

"Yes, yes, my darling," cried Nellie, disengaging herself from Mrs. Howard's embrace. "Nothing can part us." And she nestled the child tenderly in her arms as of old.

"Oh!" cried Gip to Mrs. Maybrick, "do tell auntie what you know. It is so cruel to keep her in this suspense."

"I will tell you all I know," exclaimed Meg excitedly. "Dear ma'am, I need not trouble you with my history, only let me tell all that relates to Nellie. My husband was a fisherman, and we lived at St. Bees, an out-of-the-way village perched on one of the highest cliffs on the Cornish coast. Davie Gray and Barbara his wife, Little Birdie's parents, lived anigh us. And at the time I'm speaking of Barbara was ill, and in sore trouble and fretting for the loss of her baby girl. Well, it had been a terrible winter of storms and wrecks, and March had set in wilder and more blustering than ever.

"And now the twentieth of the month had come, and all day Davie and my husband had watched the dark clouds, and knew a storm would gather, and it would be a fearful night for those at sea.

"Well, dear hearts, a little after sundown the

gale broke out in all its fury, and such a storm I never remember.

"I had been to Barbara's to get her a cup of tea, and see if I couldn't prepare something for Davie's supper, and was coming home when I met my husband.

" 'Meg,' says he, 'look there,' and he pointed to a vessel, a tidy distance off, that was pitching and tossing about, all helpless like, in the fierce, angry waves.

" 'Oh, Jack,' I cried, 'cannot it be saved?' for I thought of the men, and women, and little helpless children on board; but he could only shake his head and tell me, 'No, not a boat made could live in that heavy sea,' and that two had put off and been nearly swamped, and obliged to return.

"Well, I hurried home; and by this the evening had set in, black as midnight, and the waves roaring and beating against the shore like thunder.

"How those long hours wore on I cannot tell; I could only think of the poor ship struggling with strained cords and useless flapping sails, like a poor creature in its last agony, and listen to the boom! boom! of its guns of distress, that seemed to arise like an wild, awful cry above the roaring of the waves, the shriek of the fierce, cruel wind.

"It was near midnight when my husband returned to tell me he, Joe Redburn, and Davie

Gray had launched once more a boat to try and aid the sinking ship, but the boat had been flung like a cockle-shell on the beach, Joe Redburn nearly drowned, and that the ship was doomed, no human aid of avail to save her.

“‘Look there, Meg,’ he said, ‘and pray to God for those poor souls in their despairing agony,’ and as I hurried to the door out of the darkness I saw a sudden gleam of red light that seemed to mount to heaven, and knew the ship was on fire.”

“Oh, my child!” sobbed Mrs. Howard, burying her face in her hands; “it seems too awful to think of. But go on, tell me how my darling,” and she pointed to Nellie, “escaped.”

“I’m coming to it,” replied Meg. “There, dear heart, don’t take on so. Well, while he was speaking almost, and telling me ‘the ship couldn’t last long,’ there shot upwards one broad blaze of light, then she seemed to heave all on one side, to give another lurch, and go down headlong. There spread out a flickering band of flame, and then darkness.

“But, hush! I’ve told you of the sorrow God sends to us, now let me tell you of the gladness.

“The sun rose the next morning bright and red; there was hardly a ripple on the water. My husband had to go to the nearest town on business, so Davie Gray took the boat, and, like many others, pulled toward the wreck. Ah, dear

hearts, there was not a vestige to be seen. Well, he rowed about and was just returning, when suddenly he saw, drifting in with the tide, a broken spar with something a-top.

"But let me tell it you as I've heard Davie relate it many a time to Barbara and myself in the long winter evenings. 'I couldn't say what it was,' he said, 'but I just pulled towards it, and saw it was a long queer kind of a wicker basket lashed firmly enough on to a broken plank. Here's something, I thought, and hauled it in. It didn't take long to jerk open the lid, and, lor' a mercy, you might have knocked me down with a feather, when I saw no grand treasures or anything one would imagine floating about, but a great bundle of waterproof wrapped round and round. In a minute I had cut the string and knots that fastened it, and there, to my surprise, lay a little child with a white baby face, and sunken closed eyes, and pretty waxen fingers, stiff and cold.

"'It gave me such a shock, for a minute it seemed to take my breath away; the poor little thing looked so much like my little Nellie I had only buried the week afore. So says I, 'Well, you poor little creature, some one has loved and cared for you, and maybe hearts like Barbara's, my own dear wife, and mine are fretting and grieving for you; so it sha'n't be my fault



if I don't row you ashore and give you Christian burial;' so I just was laying it down in the boat when I saw it move. 'It's alive,' I thought, and with no more ado I whips open my coat, puts the little mite inside, buttons it tightly over, and pulls to the shore as hard as I can.'

"Well, dear hearts, it did surprise us to see Davie hurrying up the cliff and calling for me, and when I went to him he could hardly speak, but says, 'Give this to Barbara; she will take care of it.'

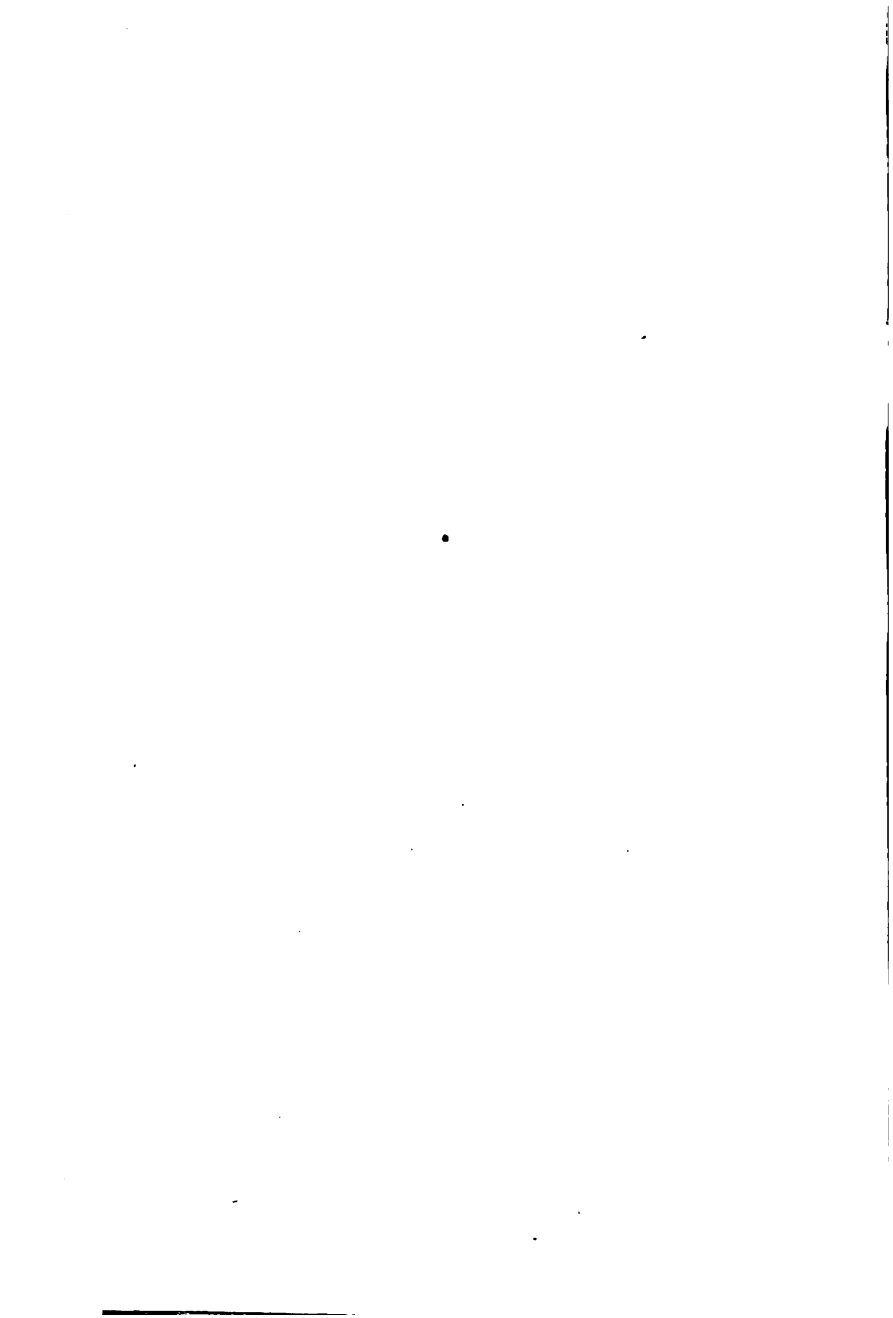
"Poor young wife! it had been such a pitiful sight to see her lying there, crying for her dead baby. She had been light-headed and wandering all the day, and holding out her arms and calling me to give her back her little one, her baby Nellie, that was lying in the churchyard. So I soon undressed the little waif from the sea, put on it one of Barbara's little child's night-dresses, gave it some warm bread and milk, and then placed it by her side. Ah! I can never forget how she turned to it, and with loving kisses clasped it to her breast, calling it by all the tender names she could think of, and from that hour she seemed to grow stronger and better, and was at last well enough to hear how this little stranger had taken the place of her dead child."

"And was this necklet found with the baby?" asked Mrs. Meadows, who had not only listened



"GIVE THIS TO BARBARA."

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with the deepest interest to Meg's narrative, but seemed as excited as the others.

"Yes, it was round the baby's neck, for I found it there when undressing it; and let me show you what else was with it;" and before a word could be uttered Mrs. Maybrick had hurried upstairs and brought down the mysterious box which Nellie remembered Mrs. Gray had taken such care of and so carefully guarded.

"There, dear madam," cried Meg, throwing open the lid; "here are the clothes the dear baby wore; can you recognize them?"

"Ah, yes," replied Mrs. Howard, gazing at them through her tears; "these little garments I made myself. See, here is my darling's monogram, 'H. H.,' embroidered on them. And this handkerchief! look at it, my child," and she turned towards Nellie, "is not 'Elsie' marked in the corner?"

"Yes, auntie, here it is," cried Lina as she examined it; for Nellie, in the surprise that had fallen on her, seemed as if unable to move: all she could do was to cling to Birdie, and with sad troubled eyes look from one to the other as if asking, could all she heard be true?

"And what is in that packet?" continued Lina, pointing to a small oil-silk bag.

"There's a letter in it, miss," said Meg; "do you recognize it, ma'am? I found it in the baby's

frock, as if it had been hastily tucked in its folds, but it had no address nor anything."

With trembling fingers Mrs. Howard opened it and took out a faded stained sheet of paper with the writing so faint as to be almost illegible.

"It is my husband's;" she exclaimed, "his letter of instructions to Mrs. Cameron as to what she should do on arriving in England. Haidée," and as she spoke the long silent name she drew Nellie tenderly to her, hot blinding tears falling like rain on the girl's startled face; "it is your father's last letter, the last one he ever penned on earth. Do you not believe me? Oh, my child, my little baby child, whom God has so mercifully restored to me, can you not feel for me, your mother? Oh, my love, it seems too great happiness to hold you in my arm, *mine*, mine, my child, and to know we shall never be parted."

But, white and resolute, yet trembling so as to be hardly able to speak, Nellie put away the loving restraining arms, and, hurrying to Birdie, clasped the child's hot feverish hand tightly within her own.

"Nellie!" said old Meg, surprised and grieved.

"Haidée!" burst from Mrs. Howard's quivering lips.

But she did not heed them. With a pale, determined face and flashing eyes she glanced at those around.

"If I am your child," and she turned to Mrs. Howard, "I will love you, and be all you wish me to be; but I cannot forget it was Birdie's mother who sheltered and tended me, and loved me," and Nellie's voice faltered, "and when she was dying she asked me to be true to her child, my little sister, and never forsake her; and I will never, never leave her;" and then catching a glimpse of Mrs. Howard's sad yearning face, she stretched out her hands, "Mother, do not, please do not, ask me."

"My darling!" and Mrs. Howard was sobbing on her newly-found treasure's neck. "Do you think I would wish such a thing? Little Birdie shall come and live with us, and I will love her, oh, my child! as dearly as if she were mine own."

But here a little hand was slipped into Mrs. Howard's, and Birdie's appealing face raised to hers.

"Please, ma'am," said the soft sweet voice—"do not fret, Nellie—let her stay a little bit with me if it makes her the happier-like. I shall not stay here long, because I'm going to Jesus and mother. May she be with me until He sends for me?"

For a moment the poor mother could not speak, then she bent down and kissed the childish face, and drew her daughter towards Birdie.

"I will not part you," she said; "God has given my child back to me—restored as it were, the

mourned, the dead. Haidée shall stay with you as long as she wishes."

"Haidée?" said Birdie wistfully.

"Nellie, dear, if you wish it; Nellie always to you, Haidée to me."

"I am so glad," was Birdie's low-breathed answer, "because now, ma'am, Nellie will never go back to London again or have to work hard for Meg and me; or go out in the cold to sell flowers or cresses. No, no, when I go up there," and she raised her hand, "I can be very happy, and mother will know Nellie will never have trouble or cry if she can't earn money. Oh, I am glad, so glad!"

And as Mrs. Howard laid the child back gently on the couch, Lina and Gip, Meg and Mrs. Meadows gathered around Nellie, or Haidée, as she should be more properly called, with loving words of relationship and congratulation.

It was a hard task for Aunt Elsie to tear herself away, but a glance at Birdie's exhausted face told her the child and her own precious new-found darling had better be left quietly together. Both were excited, and she knew Nellie's affection and all her loving devotedness were wrapped in Birdie, and it were wiser for the present to leave to time and her good sense a response to the yearning, tender craving of her own loving heart.

"It seems so strange," she whispered as she bade her dear one good-bye; "all like a dream, too good to be true; and yet, Haidée, my sweet one, ah, how like you are to your father! You have just his smile, his dear brown wavy hair. I felt drawn irresistibly to you yesterday, child, my heart went to you. I could not tell why I was attracted—it must have been nature's instinct. But you will let me come again to-morrow, and be as much as possible with you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Haidée, "do come to-morrow."

For a moment Mrs. Howard paused and looked earnestly at her.

"Haidée, my child, my precious darling, will you not wish me good-night?"

"Good-night!" was the answer, and loving arms were flung around her; "Good-night, *mother*."

I cannot describe the excitement which the tidings of Mrs. Howard's long-lost child having been found to be Mr. Rivers' protégé caused at the Manor House, or the kind old man's delight to know that he had been the means of restoring her to his favourite niece.

"Bless me!" he cried, "just to think of it, and all because I upset a flower-basket, and listened to that boy, that poor little cripple. Very strange, very. But there, there! I know now where I have



seen that child's face before. It is *yours*, Elsie, dear, your face as a child of the same age. I knew I would find it out," he added with a chuckle; "she's like you, Elsie, the image of you. Who would have thought it, eh?"





## CHAPTER XII

### LITTLE BIRDIE SAYS "GOOD-BYE."



WEEK passed slowly away, each day leaving Little Birdie weaker and weaker. And now the end was come.

Mrs. Howard had spent every moment she could spare at the sick child's couch, and the good clergyman of the parish had daily visited her, and it was with deepest pain and regret they heard Doctor Harcourt's opinion, "He did not think the child would live out the night."

Gip or Lina, who daily accompanied their aunt, and at Birdie's bedside, learnt many a lesson of gentleness, patience, and fortitude they were not likely to forget; while the more Mrs. Howard saw of her child, the more grateful and thankful she was to the Almighty for the blessing he had given her in such an example of sweet unselfishness and tender devotion. During one of Mrs. Howard's visits, Birdie had expressed a wish to say good-bye to Trottie; so the darling had been

taken into the sick child's room, with many injunctions from nurse, "She was to be very quiet, and to remember dear Little Birdie was very ill."

"Oo velly sick?" she asked, as Haidée took her upon her knee. "Oo get well soon, and come home, a-play wif me."

But Birdie shook her head. "No, little missy," she said softly, "I am going to my home," and she pointed to the blue sky, "to be with Jesus and mother."

For a moment Trottie was silent.

"Me not talk, or make a noise; no, no, me velly good, me not make oo sick 'ittle girl's head ache."

"No, dear," said Haidée.

But her loquacity got the better of her prudence, and in her childish mind she wondered where Birdie was going.

"Oo mudder gone away?" she asked. "My mudder go in puff, puff; den in big ship, and it blow, blow, ever, ever so big a way; oo mudder go dere too?"

"No, darling," said Haidée, weeping; "Birdie's dear, dear mother has gone to be with Jesus and the angels, in the bright heaven above us, and Birdie will soon be an angel with them."

"Me know," replied Trottie quickly; "Birdie go a Jesus up dere, me love Him, me say my prayers a-Him;" and closing her eyes, she reverently folded her hands, and repeated the childish

prayer—"God bless mama, and papa, my bruddy, and sisters, and," here she got a little confused, "Birdie," she exclaimed, "'ittle Birdie, and make me a dood girl, for Jesus' sake, Amen. Do oo tink Jesus hear dat?"

"Yes," answered Birdie, "I am sure he will."

"And now come, missy," said nurse, "you will tire Birdie, and make her ill; here, let me put your hat on, and we be going."

But Trottie still lingered; she evidently wished to convey some idea to Birdie, but could not find words to do so.

At last she stole softly to her, and laying her rosy cheek against hers, whispered, "Oo see Jesus soon?"

"Yes, dear," was the low faint answer.

"Den oo tell Him, me love Him velly much, and some day," and she nodded her curly head, "me come to Him, and be wif Him, and oo, and bu'ful angels."

But Birdie's only reply was to kiss the little face, and clasp her as close as her feeble strength would allow.

"Oo tell Him me try and be so dood, and love Him, and den He love me," and she looked wistfully into the sick child's face.

"He will ever love you," said Haidée; "He loves all little children."

"Den oo tell Him, oo not forget, and some day

He say, 'Ittle Trottie come a Me, and me go;" and even after the last farewells were uttered, she peeped in at the door, and, holding up her little plump finger, bade Birdie "not forget."

"Nellie," said the dying girl, as her gaze followed the retreating baby figure; "you will love her dearly, and she will make you happier, ever so much than I could have done."

These were her last conscious words; as the day wore on she became light-headed, and her mind wandered.

Haidée, Mrs. Howard, Meg, and Mrs. Meadows gathered around her, and Big Ben's soldierly form blocked up the doorway. Farmer Meadows, sympathizing and anxious, looked in twenty times to ask, "how the dear child was?" And Dick, sturdy Dick, sat in the fireside corner sobbing as if his heart would break; "Oh, mother," he said, in a tone of apology and as if ashamed of his honest tears, "she was as sweet a child, as good, and gentle as the lambs in the field; I did love her, and I shall miss her."

Strange to say, during all her wanderings she never once alluded to Golden Square, or reverted to her life in London. All its memories seemed blotted out of her young life.

It was to her Cornish home, to her father and mother, her heart clung, and to every association of her early days spent there with them.

Haidée had never left her, and now, weeping, held her clasped in her loving arms, and bent down to catch the broken sentences, the half-uttered exclamations, that every now and then, with laboured breath, passed from the childish lips.

"How the boat rocks, Nellie!" she suddenly exclaimed; "how dark and high the waves are!"

"Dear heart," cried Meg, burying her face in her hands; "she just thinks she's in her father's boat; he would many a time, on a summer's evening, give the children a row, and she was always so glad to be with him."

But Birdie did not heed her, for, clinging to Haidée, she cried:

"How fast I am going, and the waves grow higher! how cold and dark it is! faster, faster, and those big rocks before me, and I so far from you."

But Haidée, holding the restless little hands, could but bend over her, whispering loving, soothing words; while Mrs. Howard's heart was raised in prayer, that "He who stilled the stormy waves would guide this little bark through death's dark sea, and bring it to the haven of eternal peace."

With half-closed eyes, the child was silent for a time, then her mind wandered again: "Oh! Nellie, I am safe now, the black ugly waves are

passed. See! how beautiful, how calm they are; I am not afraid now; don't cry, dear, it is only getting nearer home."

"I know it is, my darling," burst from Haidée's trembling lips; "you need not fear, for He is with you. Oh! Birdie, Birdie, cannot you stay with me one little bit longer? How can I live without you?" and laying her head on the child's pillow, she burst into passionate weeping.

But already on Birdie's face was stealing

"The light that never shone on land or sea."

The sweet lips were parted, as if unable to tell the joy they could express; the soft blue eyes were already looking into heaven's glories, and from afar came the echoes of the song that is for ever sung before the throne.

"Oh! Birdie, darling," once more rang out Haidée's pathetic appeal, "will you not speak to me?"

For a moment there was no reply, then sweet and clear came the answer—"Do not keep me, Nellie; it is growing late here, and I am so tired, so very tired. See how bright and beautiful the shore looks! I am just there. Dear Jesus, bring me nearer—nearer—ah!" and with a rapture on her face that startled even those who were gazing at her, she held out her hands, as if in loving greeting. "Do you not know who is there,

Nellie?" she softly whispered; "it is mother, mother waiting for me. Stay, one moment; I come, I come."

Her arms dropped listlessly to her side, and then with one last loving effort she turned to Nellie, and flung them around her.

"Oh, Birdie, speak to me," and with a heart-rending cry she nestled the child, as of old, to her faithful breast; then with a glance of agony she looked around, "Oh! tell me, she exclaimed, "what is it? Birdie, Birdie—"

But Little Birdie had reached heaven's bright shore, passed through the golden gates, and was in the presence of the Great King.

Within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Shirley there had never been such excitement in the village, as when it became known Mrs. Howard had discovered her long-lost little daughter in one of the children staying at Willow Farm.

The news spread like wildfire, and when its novelty died away, Birdie, the sick dying child, became the object of attention, and during the one short month of her stay there nothing could exceed the sympathy and kindness shown to her.

It was the day of her funeral; and high and low, rich and poor, assembled to do honour to her memory and pay the last tribute of respect.



Old age and youth contributed to sending a wreath, a cross, a simple bunch of flowers, to be laid on the coffin—from the rarest exotics to the humblest of wild flowers (the flowers she loved so well).

Strange to say, the rose-tree, Mr. Barker's gift to Haidée, which the dead child had carefully watched and tended, and whose expanding buds had daily interested her, burst into bloom on the day when all that was mortal of her was to be laid to its final rest.

And as Haidée gazed at the bud opening in rich fragrant beauty, she thought of her promise and how the child had looked forward to its fulfilment, "Little Birdie was to have the first flower that bloomed;" and gently plucking it, she laid it in the little hand whose responsive clasp she would never feel on earth again.

Never before within the memory of the oldest inhabitant was there such a funeral. People from all parts thronged to the grave; and as the solemn procession passed down the village to the old gray church, with its quaint tower and ivied walls, each house had lowered blinds and each shop was closed.

Many, of course, might only have come from curiosity to see Haidée, the "Waif from the Sea," and others out of respect to the family; but certain it was, never was a greater assemblage in

the quiet churchyard. And when the Sunday-school children's voices were raised in "one sweet melody," there was hardly a dry eye to be seen; and surely there never could have been a sweeter or more appropriate hymn than the one selected:—

We leave, Lord, in Thy keeping,  
This precious dust, 'twill be  
Safe, where Thy servant's sleeping,  
And still o'er-watched by Thee;  
While the tired bird from prison  
Soars to the Saviour—free.

Thy mercy past all measure,  
Thy love so strong, so deep,  
Have garnered safe our treasure,  
Which we so longed to keep;  
We give Thee back Thy loan, Lord,  
And praise Thee, though we weep.

Safe from all tribulation,  
From sorrow, pain, and care;  
From the subtle world's temptation  
No more to shrink or share;  
She rests safe in Thy presence,  
Lord, we would leave her there.

Keep, Lord, our treasure, keep her,  
Though our hearts are sore to-day:  
Thou knowest, though we weep her,  
We must not say Thee nay—  
For the free bird's song is ringing  
In the land of endless day.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### BALL'S POND.

**T**HE summer passed away, and the grass was green on Little Birdie's grave, which was now marked by a pure white marble cross, erected by Mrs. Howard, bearing the simple inscription:—

“LITTLE BIRDIE;”

and underneath, the text—“And Jesus called a little child unto him.”

From the time of Birdie's death Haidée had resided with her mother, and the more Mrs. Howard saw of her child the more grateful she felt towards a merciful providence for restoring her lost darling to her, and Haidée's cousins soon learnt to love her, and to appreciate the sweet unselfishness and gentleness of her disposition, and the rare thoughtfulness, which won “golden opinions” from all who knew her.

Even Miss Wharton was never tired of sounding her praises, and holding her up, particularly

to Mr. Rivers, as an example of the most pains-taking, persevering, cleverest of pupils—one it was a pleasure, not a trouble, to teach, for she had so retentive a memory that she learnt as quickly as she could be taught, and what was better still, remembered all she learnt.

Big Ben had set up as a shoemaker in the village, and already was doing a good business, but his evenings, and indeed all his spare moments, were spent at the farm, where, to the delight of farmer Meadows and Dick, he was never tired of fighting his battles again in fancy and description; and old Meg would come daily and tidy his rooms and prepare his meals.

Mrs. Meadows had found employment on the farm for Mrs. Field's husband, and Winnie and Minnie were already growing fat rosy children.

Mrs. O'Brien and Mickey had spent a pleasant week's holiday at the Manor House, where, it must be confessed, Mickey's delight at seeing blue skies, green fields, and summer flowers was somewhat marred by the thought that Nellie Gray was a different child to Miss Howard, and it was with pain Haidée noticed the awe-struck way in which he would address her, the humble distance he would keep from her, and at last she could not help telling him and Mrs. O'Brien "that she felt towards them the same, and could never forget how much she owed to them.

"But it isn't, miss, the same," said Mickey, with a shake of his head. "You're a lady now, and when I grows to be a man you won't know me."

At which his mother would indignantly exclaim, "Whist, darlin', what do ye mane? Shure, it isn't foine clothes that mak' the lady. It's jist the kind heart, the sympathizin' way, that'll be the same if Miss Haidée wore a cotton dhress, or was decked out in voilvets and diamonds. Faith! it's the dumbest o' dumb bastes I'll be if the swatest o' young leddies ever changed or forgot ye! or, throth, one o' them who were kind to her in her throuble! Mickey, avourneen! always look to the heart, the kind feelin' heart, before ye say wan unkind word against any person!"

And as Mickey and Mrs. O'Brien pass out of this history, it may be mentioned, in grateful acknowledgment of the widow's kindness to her child, that Mrs. Howard sent them back to Mrs. O'Brien's home in the pleasant County Wicklow, and, from the last accounts she had, Mickey was already thriving, and improving so much in health as to be able to walk without crutches, and she had every hope he would grow up a strong active boy.

Of course Big Ben was another to whom Mrs. Howard felt indebted, and it was by her assistance as well as by the help of Mrs. Meadows, that

he was able to open a shop, of which the real plate-glass window and gilt letters was the glory and pride of the village.

He and Norman were fast friends; the boy was never tired of hearing the old soldier's adventures or he of relating them. And on the day of which I am about to speak, Norman, as usual perched on the counter, was listening eagerly to his narrations.

"Never go back'ards or for'ards in life, sir," said the old man, flicking away some imaginary dust with his apron. "Always go straight ahead, eyes to the front, march steady, and do your duty, and you'll never be a defaulter or come to mischief."

"Go on," replied Norman, "I like to hear your advice. I'll stick to it, never fear, like old boots."

"Aye, aye, my lad, that's right, and just take another bit of advice. Be honest, be true, and never betray your comrade."

"That I won't," and the boy gave a happy laugh. "I know if I am told to keep a fellow's secret, I'll do it."

"Yes, so you may, sir, and right you are; but, I don't know how it is, men may hold their tongues," and he glanced at Norman, who, flattered at thus being designated "a man," drew himself up, and certainly felt several inches taller, "because they ain't as a rule given to

much talking, but it's curious when one meets a woman who can keep her own counsel. Now, look at Mrs. Maybrick!" cried the old soldier. "Is she not an example any woman might follow? Bless you, sir! hasn't she the knack of learning to hold her tongue? She knew more than ever she'd tell. Ah! there ain't many like her."

"No. She's a splendid old woman, isn't she?" cried Norman. "A regular brick. Grant's fellows say she's a thorough trump to have looked after my cousin and stuck to her as she did."

"Right you are, sir. But sing'lar, ain't it," said Big Ben meditatively, "how I spied a difference in the little un that's dead and gone, to the lassie as is the pride and joy of your hearts? I've told you, sir, how Mrs. Maybrick related her history to us when we lived yonder," and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate Golden Square, "and how she wouldn't say 'Barbara's children.' Aye, I'm too old a soldier to be caught sleeping at my post, and when she said 'a secret's a secret as long as you keep it to yourself,' I thought she knew more of the little lassie than she'd tell, but she was stanch and true to her comrade—"

"Thank God I was," said old Meg, who had entered unperceived, and thus overheard the last sentence. "Thank God I was true to Barbara.

Ah! dear heart, she always had an idea, and talked often of it before she died, 'In His own good way, and in His own time, God would allow Nellie to find her friends.' And, as I was telling your dear aunt this morning, when we showed the pretty baby to Mr. Tregarthen (he was our minister, sir), he said before Barbara or Davie could bring up the child as their own he would try and find out what he could about her, and he put it into some papers, 'advertising' I think he called it, but no one noticed it, and so they looked upon the little one as their own."

"It is like a jolly story out of a book," replied Norman, "and I'm sure it's awfully good of you. There isn't one of Grant's fellows that wouldn't do anything to help you, but you're so proud—not stuck up; you know what I mean—they're afraid to offer anything. But I say, Meg, why don't you do as auntie wishes—come and live with us, and then you could be with Haidée as much as you like?"

But old Meg shook her head. "No, sir," she answered. "Mrs. Howard has promised I shall never want, and settled on me while I live enough and to spare, and I cannot tell you how I feel her kindness. So I just think of taking one of those pretty cottages in the village, and then the dear child can come and see me or I go to her, and I shall be close to all my kind friends



—you, sir, and Mrs. Meadows, and her brother, my good kind landlord, and if anyone wants me to help in any way, here I am.”

“Right you are, Mrs. Maybrick; and you’re just the good handy woman none of us can spare. But here come the young ladies.” And Big Ben drew himself up, and gave the stiffest of military salutes as Lina, Trottie, and nurse appeared in sight.

“Me ’ittle dolly’s shoes done, Mitter Barker?” cried Trottie bursting into the shop, with cheeks red as roses, blue eyes sparkling, and pretty golden curls blown anyhow by the wind and her run up the road.

“Well, missy, not quite,” answered Big Ben, smiling complacently on the pretty darling.

“Oo make *bloo* shoes,” said Trottie, in her most coaxing manner, “wif big bows; oh! dis big,” and she extended her hands to their utmost.

“Aye, aye, missy, perhaps not quite half a yard wide; but they shall be real pretty shoes, made to fit Miss Dolly, and I’ll bring them this afternoon, and try them on the young lady.”

Trottie clapped her hands with delight, and ran up to nurse to tell her the news. To have a real shoemaker, not a make-believe like Norman, or Gip, or Lina, try on her dolly’s shoes was an event not to be regarded lightly, and she was eager to let her brother and sister know of her

good fortune. But unhappily Lina had been all the morning in "her tantrums," and she was not disposed to listen to the child, or trouble herself in either the dolly or Mr. Barker's visit.

"Do come, Norman," she was saying; "we can go through the meadows. It is, you know, a half-holiday."

"But what do you want them for?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know; to put over the pictures in my bed-room. I saw such a number in the village, and I know where they come from—the pond at the end of the meadows; they're lovely great big purple bulrushes, with such tall stalks; and there are osiers there we might make lovely baskets of. Although, of course, the bulrushes are the prettiest, and the worst to get at."

"It's awfully tiresome," replied her brother; "because I promised Maynard and a lot of fellows I'd go nutting with them. But anything for a quiet life, and so that you sha'n't tease Trottie, and she shall come with us."

Lina pouted for a moment, but, seeing Norman was determined the child should accompany them, reluctantly assented.

"Where are you going?" asked nurse, as she saw them anxious to leave Mr. Barker's and hurry up the road.

"Only through the meadows to get some bulrushes; we sha'n't be long, and shall be back

before Aunt Elsie and Haidée have returned from their drive. Here, come along, Trottie," and Norman caught the child by the hand.

"No, no, Master Norman," cried nurse, "Miss Trottie stays with me;" but with a glad laugh, and "Me come a-oo," wilful Trottie clung to her brother, and hurrying along as fast as her little legs could carry her, the three turned the corner and were out of sight before nurse, who was stout and short of breath, could prevent them.

"Oh, dear! did ever one see such children?" was all she could say, as, cross and vexed with herself for letting them go, she sat down and began fanning herself violently with her pocket-handkerchief; "it's enough to worrit one's life out, to have to foller them about all day."

"Don't trouble, ma'am," replied Mr. Barker, "the pretty dears will come to no harm;" but old Meg looked grave and shook her head; in her heart she disapproved of nurse allowing so young a child as Trottie out of her sight, or letting Lina go near the pond, without some older and more responsible person than a boy of Norman's age being with her.

"Well," said nurse rising, "I must be going and see what's become of those children, or else they'll be getting *me* into trouble. You'll send those boots some time to-day?"

"Aye, aye, ma'am, you shall have them," and

as Big Ben opened the door for her to pass out, old Meg gently laid her hand upon his arm, and drew him back.

"Mr. Barker," she said, strangely agitated, "you know the way through the fields to the pond; for the Lord's sake go after those dear children."

"To the pond, Mrs. Maybrick," he exclaimed; "you don't mean to say that's where they've gone?"

"I do; and would go myself, but I do not know the way, and there's no time to be lost. Oh! Mr. Barker, should anything happen to them I would never forgive myself. Oh! go—go at once," and old Meg wrung her hands.

For a moment Big Ben looked aghast: he had often in taking his work home come by Ball's Pond, and only on the previous day had noticed how the late heavy rains had swollen it, and made it look, as he then remarked, "a nasty place for a tumble." "No time to be lost, not a moment; what could that silly woman be about to sit here prating about her boots, and those darlings in danger! Here, give me my hat and that crooked stick. Right you are, Mrs. Maybrick, they're in danger maybe; but, aye, aye, keep up, don't fret; I'll to the rescue."

It was a pleasant October afternoon, and the hedgerows on either side of the short lane lead-

ing to the meadows were bright with scarlet hips, ruddy haws, and golden berries, while tall stately foxgloves, ox-eyed daisies, and many an autumn woodland flower made the banks look gay and bright.

Another time the silvery feathery clusters of the wild clematis, or the trailing, richly laden blackberry bushes with their luscious ripening fruit, would have tempted Norman or his sisters to have lingered and gathered them; but, as it was, he urged them to hurry on, and quickly the three sped down the lane, across the meadows, and in a few minutes were standing by the pond.

"Oh, Norman!" cried Lina, "did you ever see such rushes? they are beauties; do make haste and get me some of the tallest."

"It's jolly fine to say, 'get some,'" was the reply, "but not so jolly easy to do so. I think it will be awfully hard to get any; can't you see they grow more in the middle than the sides of the pond. Hi! look out! be careful of Trottie, the banks are as slippery as old boots. Don't, Lina, let her come near the edge. Go back, darling, and I'll pick you a beautiful rush, that big purple one. Here, I will swing myself across to that old willow—what a funny old fellow it is and how low it grows in the water!—and then I'll cut you a lot."

"All-a-me?" cried Trottie excitedly. "Dood boy, Nor, oo pick me big ones?"

"Indeed he shall not," exclaimed Lina angrily. "He shall give me the bulrushes, and you shall have none of them."

"Go away, naughty Lina," answered Trottie, with dignity, "oo geedy girl;" and with a stamp of her little foot she turned appealingly to Norman, and began to cry.

"Shut up, Lina!" cried the boy, as, astride a gnarled bough of the old tree, he was hacking right and left of the rushes. "It is a shame teasing her so; I declare I will write to the Mater, and tell her how you go on to the poor little thing. Here, Trottie, stop that row, don't be such a duffer as to howl, I can't bear it. Look at this rush, is it not a splendid one?" and Norman waved it over his head to show its length and thickness. "Now, hold out your hands, catch— Oh! Lina, don't do that; you do not know how deep and dangerous the pond is." But the warning came too late, as the child with a shout of delight, and outstretched hands, sprang forward to seize the bulrush. Lina, white with passion, in the mad jealous rage of the moment pulled her back, and as she struggled to pick the rush fallen at her feet, gave her a push forward. There was a loud cry as Trottie, trying to grasp the tufts of grass and bramble-bushes to stay

her fall, slipped down the steep bank, and, rolling over and over, disappeared in the depths below.

To the last hour of her life Lina will never forget the anguish, the despair of Norman's face, as, startled and horror-struck, he gazed at the circle of eddying ripples that marked the spot where the child had fallen.

"What have I done?" burst from her ashy lips. "Oh! Norman, save her, save her;" and, with a wild shriek, she pointed to the little figure rising to the surface about a yard from him.

"Keep up, Trottie, I'm coming," was all he could say, as he flung himself into the water and struck out towards her. "I'm coming, Trottie," was again his cheery cry; "hold on, for a moment, to that tree." It was only a small shrub overhanging the edge of the pond, but the dear child heard his voice, and with wonderful presence of mind caught, as she drifted past, one of its slender boughs.

"Thank God," was all Norman could utter between his clenched teeth, "she is safe now; look up, my pretty, don't be afraid:" and swimming round and round to keep out of the child's eager grasp, that, weak as it was, might drag him down and bring death to both of them, he suddenly made a dart forward, and seizing her firmly by her dress struck out with all his might for the

opposite side, where Lina was standing, wringing her hands and shrieking wildly for help. Norman had just strength to hold Trottie, wet and dripping, for her to catch hold of and drag up the bank, when his foot slipped and he fell backwards, striking as he did so against a sharp projecting branch of the old tree, and then lying stunned and motionless across it.

To describe the anguish of Lina would be impossible. A lifetime seemed concentrated in the misery, remorse, and regret for her evil temper, that in one moment seized her. Too plainly, when too late, she saw the wickedness of her spiteful conduct toward her little sister, and the awful consequences; the loneliness of the home without Norman's bright face and cheery voice; the anguish and despair of her parents at the desolation *she* had brought on them; and the cloud, dark and thick as night, she had cast upon the sunshine of each life dear to her. She could not speak or raise to heaven one despairing cry, all she could do was to clasp Trottie tighter in her arms, and gaze with horror at *her work*; but the child, with an intelligence far beyond her years, saw something was wrong, and that some one more than Lina was necessary to help Norman.

Sliding to the ground, and for the moment it was doubtful if Lina missed her, she set off as



fast as she could up the bank, screaming as she did, "Come-a-Nor', he in the pond;" on, on she went, her wet clothes hanging heavily about her, her poor little legs torn by the brambles, her eyes blinded by tears, but sweet'and clear rose the childish voice, and great was her delight, as picking herself up from a more than usual thorny bush over which she had stumbled, to hear a familiar voice—"Aye, aye, little lassie, I'm a-coming"—answering her, and to see Mr. Barker hurrying towards her as fast as his lameness would permit.

The sight of the child, her wet dress, white pitiful face, and hands stretched out pleading for help, told the old man something serious had happened; and taking her up in his arms he was quickly by Lina's side.

But she was still too dazed to comprehend that assistance was near or even to notice Trottie or her companion; with clasped hands and her horrified glance resting on the motionless form before her, she remained in the same attitude as when her little sister had left her.

But one look around was enough. Big Ben saw Norman's danger, and began to turn over in his mind the best way to save him. In a moment he had swung himself across to the willow, and stooping down tried to grasp the boy, but unfortunately his wounded knee prevented his kneel-

ing or bending far enough over to obtain a firm hold.

For almost the first time in his life the old soldier was puzzled, and unable to act for the best. He might have dropped into the water and tried to get at Norman in that way, but he could not swim, and the branch on which he had fallen was too high to reach.

But help was at hand, and that from a most unexpected quarter. It came in no other shape than that of Nep, the great brown retriever.

During the summer months Norman had frequently brought him here to have a swim, and whether it occurred to his canine mind that the day was favourable for a bath or whether he missed his young master cannot be told, but certain it was, with joyous barks and sundry wags of his feathery tail he came bounding down the bank, and running up to Lina rubbed his honest face against her dress and tried to poke his head into her hand. At the touch of his cold brown nose Lina started, and looked down at the faithful creature. "Oh, Nep," she cried, flinging her arms around his neck, "look there!" and she pointed to Norman; "save him, Nep, save your master."

"Come, good dog," shouted Big Ben. "Hi! in there, make haste." But Nep needed no second bidding, he had turned his eager gaze on Nor-

man, and his large brown eyes seemed almost human in their intelligent anxiety. For a moment he was restless and ran up and down the edge of the pond, then he plunged in and made for the old tree.

The old soldier coolly awaited him, and gently shaking the tree the bough on which Norman rested swayed backwards and forwards, altering thereby the boy's position. Another shake, and he dropped below to be seized by Nep, who, with a grip of his powerful jaws on his jacket, soon made his way bravely to the bank.

Big Ben was there awaiting the precious burden, and helped the dog to deposit it on the grass, where, quickly divesting the boy of his wet jacket, he wrapped his own greatcoat around him, and, taking him up in his arms, set off as fast as he could towards the house.

"Now, miss," and he turned to Lina, "you must go on quickly ahead, and tell them to have hot bottles or bricks and a warm bed ready; and let Miss Trottie run as fast as she can to keep her from cold or taking harm from her ducking. Ah! miss, you may look at him; but I expect it will be a case for the cleverest sawbones in the village, and the sooner he sees him the better. There, don't cry; if you lose your head what's to become of him or the little lassie yonder?"

But Lina, shuddering, could not but look at

the white face before her, on which already the shadow of death seemed settling, so calm and still it was, so stiff and rigid the motionless limbs.

But she saw the wisdom of the old man's advice, and set off running across the meadows as fast as she was able, Trottie following for a short distance, and then hurrying back to shake her pretty head and inform Big Ben, "Poor Nor' velly sick, but he not fall in nasty pond again;" or to give a grateful hug to Nep, and burying her baby face in his curly coat, cry, "Dood doggie, oo love Nor'," and then nestling to him press her soft red lips against his honest face, or give a happy laugh as with a mighty shake he would send a shower like rain-drops from his dripping coat flying over her; while the old soldier limping slowly behind began to find Norman's weight tell heavily on his strength, and thankful was he when, in the figure of a man who was approaching, he recognized one of the sturdiest of his sister's farm labourers, and, resigning the boy to his care, saw him set off at a quick pace to the Manor House.

Mrs. Howard, Haidée, and Gip had just returned from a drive, and were slowly ascending the steps of the hall door, when they were startled by a piercing scream, and saw Lina wringing her hands, with blanched face and

dilated eyes, rushing towards them. "Oh! auntie," she exclaimed, gasping for breath, "it is all my fault, all my wicked temper; I have killed Norman; killed my brother. Oh, auntie, auntie, may God forgive me!"





## CHAPTER XIV.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."



MUST not dwell on Norman's illness; suffice to say for many weeks he lay between life and death.

The chill he had taken from his wet clothes brought on a fever and delirium, during which he knew none of the anxious watchers around him; and even when the danger from that had passed away, Dr. Harcourt was of opinion the fall he had sustained over the willow branch had injured his spine, and it might be months (and even not then unless he was careful of himself) before he would be able to walk again.

And during that long weary time of anxiety, who can describe Lina's feelings or her state of mind! No one had reproached her, not even nurse, usually so sharp with her tongue, had said one unkind word for the unhappy consequences of her jealous uncontrollable temper and the sorrow and suffering it had caused. Perhaps

nurse's conscience did not quite acquit her of blame and her share in the matter. As it was, Lina met with nothing but gentleness and loving kindness; every one seemed to know how much she was suffering and how bitterly and deeply she repented the past.

Indeed, reproaches would at that time have been useless; Lina could not have borne them, for her health was giving way under the trial her own folly had brought upon her. And not the hardest part of it was to know Doctor Harcourt had strictly forbidden her to enter the sick-room. She could see all the others, even to Meg and Miss Wharton, passing in and out; but he had sternly forbade her one glimpse of her brother, one loving entreaty for his forgiveness.

Hour after hour, with white despairing face, tearless and silent, she would crouch outside his door, listening to his voice, but never once hearing her name mentioned by him; indeed, it was noticed, strange as it may appear, in his delirium Norman would recognize at times the anxious watchers around him, and call incessantly for Trottie, but the name of Lina never once escaped him.

There she would remain until Aunt Elsie, Haidée, Gip, or even Miss Wharton, with loving, tender words would lead her away, when she would seek the solitude of her own room, and

there, giving way to her overwhelming sorrow and self-reproach, would fling herself on her knees by the side of her bed, and sobbing as if her heart would break, implore the Almighty to pardon her great sin and spare her brother; "only forgive me, dear Lord, and visit my great sin upon me," was her earnest cry, "but spare Norman."

At last, Norman, perfectly conscious, was pronounced out of danger, and had asked for Trottie, and Lina had seen Aunt Elsie take her into his room.

The dear child had suffered little from her ducking, the run she had had home having circulated her blood and prevented her taking cold; and now her chief amusement was to rehearse the scene at the pond at every possible opportunity. Into every basin of water or bath she would plunge her dollies, sending in the unfortunate kitten after them or the animals out of Noah's ark.

"Oo come-a-Nor'?" she asked, as with a big toy box in her arms she passed Lina on the stairs.

"No, darling," was the sorrowful reply.

The child looked surprised, and dropping the box, she flung her arms around her neck. "Oo want to see him velly much, me tell him," she whispered, nodding her pretty curly head.

"No, no," said Lina, "I must not see him;



Doctor Harcourt will not let me," and burying her face in her hands she burst into tears.

"Bless me! What is the matter? Why, Lina, child, what is this all about?" and Uncle Hugh, who had been lately a frequent visitor at the Manor House, laid his hand gently upon her arm.

"Oh, uncle," she answered, sobbing, "if I could only see Norman; only know he forgave me; I am so wretched;" and, laying her head on his shoulder, she cried as if her heart would break.

"Bless me! You must not go on like this, my dear child, you will be ill, you will indeed. Come with me, and tell me all about it. Here, come in here. Eh?" and Mr. Rivers, who had not been told of Lina's share in Norman's illness, led her quietly into the drawing-room; and there, with many a cough to clear his husky throat, and wiping his spectacles that would get unaccountably and suddenly dimmed, he heard her story and listened to her bitter self-reproaches.

Long and earnestly he talked to her, and it was with a lightened heart she left him.

"We will not talk of what might have been, my dear, nor do I wish to add to the sorrow and regret you feel, but pray for God's assistance to curb your temper in the future, and when tempted to give way to it just think of the terrible lesson you have had and avoid its recurrence. There,

there, child, do not cry; you shall see Norman, and make it square with him. Bless me! we have all of us tempers. Bad, every one of them; but what we must do is try and control them. Ah! here comes the doctor, the very person I want to see. Now, my dear, run away, I want to speak to him for a few minutes. Come in here, Doctor, I have something to say to you. Now, Lina child, don't fret any more. If you've sinned you've suffered, and one can't do more than that. There's nothing like true repentance for one's faults, and an earnest desire to act better for the future." And as Lina, sobbing, turned away, he drew Doctor Harcourt into the room, and closed the door. What passed between the two did not transpire; but Lina's heart was gladdened by Doctor Harcourt saying to her the next day—"I am sure, Miss Lina, you are sorry for what you did. I believe, *now*, *not* wilfully. Your brother has asked for you, and you may see him this afternoon;" and as she sobbed out her thanks, he added so kindly, "and you must help to nurse him and get him well."

But with what a beating heart she entered his room, and how her sorrow was increased tenfold by the sight of him! Was this Norman? the bright round-faced healthy boy, with laughing eyes and happy smile; the white-faced, sunken-eyed, hollow-cheeked figure before her; but his

voice, weak and far off as it sounded, reassured her, and with a faint cry she sprang forward.

"Oh, Norman!" she exclaimed, and paused to check the passionate sobs that would find their way.

"There, hush! old girl. I am so glad to see you," and he feebly tried to put his arm around her. "Don't cry; look at Trottie;" and he pointed to the rosy-faced, dimpled, golden-haired, little darling, who, seated on the bed, was trying to make a regiment of tin soldiers stand on the counterpane. "She wants me to blow through this tin tube and knock them down. There, never mind, Lina, don't bother yourself about me; please God, I shall be well and strong again, as strong as old boots," and he tried to laugh his old merry laugh.

"But oh, Norman," was all she could utter, as she fell on her knees beside him, "can you forgive me all the sickness and suffering I have caused you? it was all my wicked, wicked temper, and I am so sorry;" but sobs choked her utterance, she could not get the words she wished out.

His hand feebly and lovingly strayed over the coverlid, and rested upon her bent head—"Lina, darling, I forgive you; say nothing more about it, only try and be kind to our little sister, 'Little Trottie.'"

And Lina, with upraised face and streaming

eyes, answered—"Dear Jesus, hear my cry and help me. With God's help, Norman, I promise."

And she kept her word.

Christmas has come and gone, and already snowdrops, crocuses, and sweet-scented early violets are springing up in many a pleasant nook. Gip and Lina know where to find them, and are only too glad to show them to Haidée, and with her gather the delicate blossoms for Norman's sick-room.

"I used to think flowers 'bosh,' and only fit for girls," he would say, "but now, somehow, I like to see them. Indeed, if I could get out again, I think I would love a nettle. But I dare-say it's all for the best; for, you see, when I was well and strong I never thought of these things; but now, I seem to have been brought so close 'face to face' with death, as it were, I don't think I could ever be the careless indifferent sort of a fellow I was. No, don't go away, Lina dear, or cry like that. It's well at some time or other in our life we should feel our own insufficiency and weakness, and the mercy and goodness of the Almighty in bringing us through so much. Yes! not only could I love a nettle, but I think words could never express the gratitude I should feel at His sparing me to see one."

At last the day came when he was able to be carried by Wilson down-stairs, and laid on a couch by the open window, with the fresh, soft, spring air stealing in and the song of many birds without. For the first few moments he seemed to enjoy the change, but when Gip stole softly to him she found he had turned his face to the wall and was crying bitterly. The sight was so unusual, it startled her. All through Norman's illness, much as he had suffered, she had never seen him shed a tear; with a patience and manly fortitude he had borne all without even a murmur or complaint, and now to see "tears" was something too surprising. "Oh, Norman dear! tell me what is the matter? Do you feel worse?" was all she could say.

"No, dear," was the reply. "I really feel much stronger, and quite believe old Harcourt when he says I shall get about well and as if nothing had happened in another month or two."

"Then tell me, do, dear, what is fretting you?" and Gip bent down lovingly to kiss the tear-stained face.

"You will think me such a cry baby, such a muff."

"No, indeed, dear, I should never think that."

He was silent for a moment, and then turning to her, suddenly exclaimed, "Gip, you do not

know how I long to see the dear old Dad and the Mater."

She was silent.

"There now!" and he turned almost angrily away, "I knew you would think me a fool, a mammy sick idiot."

"Oh no! Nor' dear, it is not that; I am so glad you really want them back," and tears glistened in Gip's honest brown eyes.

"Want them back! indeed I do. You don't know what it is, Gip, lying here day after day. I used to think myself a very fine fellow, and laugh at this and that; but, although I am but a boy, I see how foolish, what a prig I've been—a vain conceited ass. Sickness takes it out of one, doesn't it?"

"Indeed it does, dear," and Gip gently stroked back the pretty brown curls she remembered her mother had been so proud of.

"I have you all around me," continued Norman, "each one trying to be so kind and to do all they can for me. I know how good you all are, and yet, when I see auntie and Haidée together, how they love each other! and I say, Gip," and Norman raised himself from the pillow, "isn't she an awfully good girl? I believe many a time I should have broken down, but it was her jolly quiet manner, something so sweet; you know?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, then, they made me think of the Mater. Oh, Gip! if I could but say my prayers to her again; I used to think it a bore; but now—" and the boy turned his face away and covered it with his hands. "I am all right now," and he laid his head wearily on her shoulder. "What was the telegram auntie had this morning?"

"Oh! Norman dear, do not ask me."

"No! no!" said Trottie, stealing up with a look of importance on her face, and the last of her newly-bought dolls in her arms. "Oo mustn't know a big secret."

"A big secret! come, Trottie darling, tell me what it is," and the boy turned wearily to her.

But the darling only pursed up her baby lips, and gravely shook her head.

"Me no tell," she answered with dignity. "Auntie say, Trottie never tell, and me say nuffen."

"What can it be?" said Gip excitedly. "What secret has she? I know of none."

"Go away, Gip," and Trottie stamped her foot in baby anger. "Oo not to know."

"But you'll not be cross with me," said Norman. "See how sick I am!"

She looked lovingly at him, and giving him the doll to hold, whispered softly:

"It's bu'ful;" then, nestling closer to him, she added, "and all white."

"What can she mean?" and once more Norman looked at Gip, who seemed as much in the dark as himself.

"It's all white? Oh! I think I know," she answered, as a light suddenly dawned upon her. "It's a lovely little white rabbit Mrs. Meadows gave Haidée, and she has given it to Trottie for Lina."

"Oo want to see it?" and she put her arms around her brother's neck. "Auntie's got it, and Lina not know. Oh! no, me not tell her."

"Of course not," said Norman. "No one can keep a secret like you, Trottie."

"Wif 'ittle legs, and big ears, and one 'ittle tail," cried the child eagerly. "Auntie say, Trottie kiss pretty 'ittle bunny, and give it a Lina; but me never tell. Oh no!"

"Certainly not," said Gip, "because I knew your secret yesterday, and guessed what it was to-day; but go now, like a darling, and take dolly. Norman looks too tired to talk any more; there, kiss him, and say good-bye for the present. Ah! here is nurse. Now go, like a dear good child, with her;" and as Trottie, obedient for once, did as she was told, Gip turned eagerly to Norman, and, arranging his pillows for him, drew his head again to rest upon her shoulder.



For some time he remained quiet and as if sleeping, but suddenly opening his eyes, he said again:

"I say, Gip, you never told me. What was the telegram Auntie had this morning?"

"Oh! Norman dear, do not ask me."

"Hark! what is that? Who is coming to see us? I say, Gip, what carriage is it coming up the avenue?"

But Gip could not answer.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of approaching wheels, a carriage dashed up, the hall door was opened, there was a sound of suppressed whisperings, a mad rush of welcome and frantic barks of delight from Nep, and a sudden scream from Trottie, with bursts of happy laughter, then a murmur of glad voices, a light footstep ascending the stairs, the door slowly opened, and Norman was clasped in his mother's arms.

"Oh! my boy, my dear boy!" was all Mrs. North could say, as her tears and kisses fell upon his pale face. "Are you not glad to see me?"

But Norman could not for the moment speak, the joyful surprise had almost been too great to bear.

He could only rest happy and contented in her embrace, and look up to the sweet face bent so lovingly over him. Ah! never in his life had he known how fair, how dear it was to him.

"Well, my boy!"

"But, Mater dear—," was all he could say.

"Ah! it was all your good auntie's doing, she telegraphed for me to come. We were just going to Meerut when I received her message—'Come immediately.' Of course your dear father and I were greatly alarmed, for we knew it was only something very serious or important that would make her wish for my return, so I started off at once, caught the homeward mail at Calcutta, and here I am."

"Oh, mother dear! I am so glad to see you," and with bright glistening tears in his eyes the boy looked up fondly into her face.

"Not more, my child, than I am to see you, and to thank those around you for their kindness and attention in your illness. Oh! my boy, how gracious has been the Almighty in sparing you to us; but I will not speak more of that at present," continued Mrs. North, as she saw how white and distressed Lina appeared at the allusion to his illness.

"Ah!" and she turned to Haidée, "here is my newly found niece, and drawing the girl to her she kissed her tenderly. "How like you are, child, to your dear mother! you have just the sweet loving face I can remember she had. Thank God, my dear little girl, you are restored to her, the sweetest, the gentlest, the best of women.

"And now let me tell you some good news;" and with Gip and Lina's arms lovingly encircling her, and Trottie, who seemed too amazed to speak, on her lap, Mrs. North smilingly continued: "or ought I to keep it a secret a little longer?"

But the mention of the word "secret" was enough for Trottie.

Looking up into her mother's face with sparkling eyes she exclaimed, "Me know, but me not tell, oh! no," and she shook her curly head.

"Why, my darling, have you a secret?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Me got a big one. Oo secret big?" she asked wistfully.

"It's a very nice one," said Mrs. North, kissing the lovely excited baby face.

"All white," said Trottie, "wif 'ittle legs and one 'ittle big tail."

"What can she mean?" and her mother looked inquiringly around.

"Oh! Trottie," said Gip reproachfully, "now you've told."

"No, no," she exclaimed, "me keep big secret, but me tell my mudder."

"Yes, darling," said Aunt Elsie, "never keep a secret from her;" and so the child thus encouraged raised herself in Mrs. North's arms, and, laying her soft peach-like cheek on hers, whispered in a whisper loud enough for all to hear:

"Me got bu'ful bunny, me a give it a Lina for

her buff-day," and then clapping her pretty dimpled hands she laughed merrily.

Poor Lina! Surely for the past evil she had done Trottie was heaping coals of fire on her head.

"And a very dear little secret it is," said the happy mother; "and now, my children, will you hear mine?"

"Oh, yes! do tell us," was the general exclamation.

There was a pause, during which every eye was fixed on Mrs. North.

"What do you say," she continued, as she gazed lovingly around, "to your dear father having a home appointment and being back again with us by the next mail steamer?"

"Hooray!—hurrah!" and Norman feebly waved his hand.

"Oh, Mater darling, what good news!"

"And then, my children," and happy tears stood in her eyes, "with God's blessing we shall not be parted again."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Uncle Hugh, who had silently joined the happy group. "I am glad to hear such good news, and to see you all again; and when I think—" but here he had to take off his spectacles and rub them vigorously, whilst his voice seemed rather quivering and husky, "when I think on all the troubles, the many sorrows you

have had," and he drew Haidée gently towards him, "I feel, my dears, how true are the Psalmist's words—

‘Heaviness may endure for a night,  
But joy cometh in the morning.’”

THE END.



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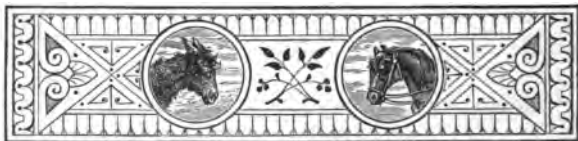
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